ABSTRACT

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FLIGHT: AN EPIC JOURNEY IN THE LEGEND OF THE FLYING AFRICANS

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This study examines the term flight, as both motif and as consciousness in the legend of the flying Africans, and the cosmological differences as represented in four texts: Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon,* Paula Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow,* Ralph Ellison's *Flying Home,* and Octavia Butler's *Kindred.* Flight is measured in terms of recurring patterns found within the texts and their meanings given by the authors. The problem of this research stems from the issue that the Gullah, direct descendents of the flying Africans (Igbos) along the Coastal Sea Islands of the United States, have upheld an age hierarchy of secrecy such that there is limited research in the area of flight, allowing this group to maintain a unique African identity for over 200 years.

This study was based on the premise that the Igbos' concept of flight was not only a survival mechanism but also a way to form community and identity and to keep the memories of their ancestors alive. This idea is called epic memory, that which has to be pieced together in order for the person to be made whole.

An intertextual historiography analysis approach was utilized as the methodology to better understand the life and culture of the Gullah and Igbos. Karla F. C. Holloway argues that revision, (re)membrance, and recursion are always present when analyzing "speakerly texts."

The researcher found that numerous recurring patterns within the selected texts began to form meaning around beliefs and myth within culture remembered during epic events. The patterns were often obscure with hidden codes that were revealed after the understanding or gist of the plot came to view.

The conclusion drawn from the findings suggest that the flying Africans were able to fly home at will because of epic memory, and that all African descended peoples are able to recall the fragmented pieces regardless of geographical location.

FLIGHT: AN EPIC JOURNEY IN THE LEGEND OF THE FLYING AFRICANS

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

Epic. Is the remembrance or recomposed portions of past and present events.

Fractured psyche. The rending and mutilation of human spirit, a process that Represents an unavoidable consequence of traumatic cultural displacement.

Gideonites. A group of northern missionaries from the Boston area who traveled to the Sea Islands of South Carolina and Georgia to assist newly freed slaves.

Maafa. The African Holocaust compounded by the oppressiveness of enslavement.

Ontological: Beingness.

Sanskrit. A language of India among the Hindu's often used in religion.

Spiritual wholeness. This term speak to the restoration of wholeness, which means that the spirit is gathered up, healed, and revealed unto itself. Other terms with the same meaning are: regeneration, reintegration, and reclamation.

Spirituality. In the West African sense, as an embodiment of dynamic energy separate from the physical body but essential to its well being, both physically and emotionally.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In North America's past history of slavery, especially in the Southeastern region of the United States, the Africans' innate desire for human rights, identity, and emancipation was the underlying yearning of a people already endowed with a level of human consciousness that opposed systems of oppression. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to investigate flight, both as motif and as consciousness, in the legend of the Flying Africans, as represented in four selected texts: Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow,* Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, Octavia Butler's *Kindred*, and Ralph Ellison's *Flying Home.*

Flight, in this research is defined as a motif, a recurring theme or subject, and as a level of black consciousness, whereby one has the ability to "Return" or reconnect with spiritual ancestors in mind, body, and spirit, thus transcending space and time. The recurring patterns of flight as demonstrated in black literary texts, especially the selected texts for this research, often include spiritual power, consciousness, and identity. This research demonstrates 1) how the texts include flight, and 2) how flight grows out of the legend of the Flying Africans and the various ways it can be interpreted, whether as freedom, an escape, an actual occurrence, as consciousness, a metaphor, or survival. Flight then is more than physical flying.

The Flying Africans were Igbo ethnic groups brought to North America from West Central Africa, specifically modern day Nigeria to work rice plantation fields. Later the Igbos made indigo and worked cotton fields. The Igbos discussed in this research arrived along the Coastal Sea Islands of Georgia and South Carolina in 1803 and 1858, rebelled, and had a certain level of consciousness whereby the Igbos struggled with the new physical and mental locations of what was ahead on the slave plantations. During the rebellion, still chained together, the Igbos walked into the water singing a song and never looked back. The survivors were dispersed to various parts of Georgia, South Carolina, and later Florida. The Gullah African-American ethnic groups along the Coastal Sea Islands are direct descendants of these rice plantation workers. The Gullah has maintained their Africanness and cultural history preserved by their ancestors, the Igbos, as a form of remembrance.

The Igbos demonstrate an awareness of their heritage that extends beyond perception, location and containment, thus juxtaposing flight with mythology, reality, and its usage in language. Research implies that the Igbos and other ethnic groups from the Gambia, Niger, and Congo Rivers stretching as far as the southern end of Portuguese West Africa,[1] arrived in the Americas with a certain level of consciousness that presently is seen among coastal Georgians, South Carolinians and Florida ethnic groups presently in their struggle for survival and cultural preservation. The Gullah is often overlooked as an important American community because of ethnic, cultural, and language differences.

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[1] Georgia Writer's Project, *Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies Among the Georgia Coastal Negroes* (Georgia: Publishing in Motion, 2011), 1.

Their refusal to integrate into mainstream society demonstrates their strength and tenacity to survive within another's aesthetic.

Statement of the Problem

The Gullah community remains because they hold ontological information that is central to their survival. The Gullah along the Sea Islands are one of the only surviving intact groups of African-conscious descendants who survived slavery, the Maafa, and who undoubtedly had an understanding about their existence which surpass westerners concept of slavery. The Gullah hold keys to both America's past and America's future and this is seen in their sustainability. Presently, the Gullah continues to fight political battles concerning land piracy and increased taxes. As recent as October 2013, WSAV Channel 3 Station in Savannah, Georgia broadcast a news story about the ongoing fight between the county tax office and the Gullah people selling their land. Land ownership and equality are critical to the Gullah peoples' survival and are some of the reasons that caused their ancestors to fight during the Seminole (Gullah Wars) that span from 1814 to 1858. These wars include the Stono Rebellion (1739), the first Seminole War (1814), Denmark Vesey's Revolt (1822), and The Second Seminole War (1835-1842). In each of these wars, Gullah men and women either started the uprising or joined forces and partnered with the Seminoles in Spanish Florida because of ill treatment imposed on slaves and their willingness to fight for freedom. Over nine thousand Gullah people supported Denmark Vesey's Revolt in 1822.[2]

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[2] Marquetta Goodwine, *The Gullah War* in *The Legacy of Ebo Landing: Gullah Roots of African American Culture* (Atlanta: Clarity Press, 1998), 36.

In spite of continual efforts by developers, investors, and state officials to take their land, their identity, and their livelihood, the Gullah have systematically fought for justice, human rights, and preservation. Their demeanor at first glance is often misunderstood because of limited contact with mainstream society and little to no communication with strangers until relationships of trust are built. The Gullah has strict cultural secret and they handle all social issues within their community that is common in West African tribes. The dissemination of information is prearranged by spokespeople. Within this group lies important aspects of their African culture related to collective cohesiveness and memory, and transmigrations directly linked to *spirit,* that invisible force that guides behaviors and beliefs while simultaneously retelling history.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study to the discipline of African-American Studies reveals that the Gullah community has insufficient research in the area of tradition, culture, and its influence on African Americans in the 21st century compared to others ethnic groups in the United States. Additionally, there is a need for further research which enhances the tradition of history/heritage around flying, thus offering a new perspective around Gullah culture and life.

Further, there are three significant reasons for this research. First, there is a shortage of research on the topic of flight in academic texts because of secrecy and this research adds to the scholarship. This shortage of research is due to the secrecy around Gullah traditions, age hierarchy, and which tends to limit the kind of research done.

Moreover, Melville J. Herskovits believes that the Africans' ability to hold secrets is an African survival and is "the fundamental reason for our ignorance of the race and its background."[3] This approach regarding the secrecy of the Gullah makes it impossible to understanding certain areas of tradition and culture of which flight emerges and could possibly have another meaning.

Additionally, films reflective of the Gullah include *Sankofa* as a major resource and provide a critical viewpoint portraying a young African woman's assimilation into the American lifestyle and her forced journey through the route of her African ancestors enslaved in America. She witnesses and experiences the horrors of Cape Coast Castle in Ghana, then is physically placed on a plantation where her identity is stripped and she is forced to reconnect with her African heritage, learn the old African ways, and then return *home* an enlightened being. *Sankofa* provides a linkage and hope to families far removed from their homelands. Likewise, *Daughters of the Dust* reenacts Gullah life and culture of 1912 on Dawtuh Island in South Carolina's Low Country where African-American women journey back to their African heritage. Two other films *Family Across the Sea* and *The Language You Cry In* produced between 1990 and 1999 demonstrate the ideology of the return home. This research supplements scholarship on the topic of flight and enhances upon the idea of metaphysical flight and epic memory.[4]

Second, the ability of the Gullah to maintain a unique identity, cohesiveness, and consciousness for over 200 years is perhaps proof that this group holds a secret that is yet to be revealed to mainstream America or African Americans. This research investigates

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[3] Melville Herskovits, F. S. Herskovits, *Rebel Destiny: Among the Bush Negroes of Dutch Guiana* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1934), 266-67.

[4] Epic is the remembrance or recomposed portions of past and present events.

the Igbo Africans' concept of consciousness and seeks to expand knowledge on an already familiar practice of spirit and consciousness within American or African American society. The power of spirituality and tradition has been very instrumental in community efficacy for centuries after the Atlantic Slave Trade, the Middle Passage, Black Codes and Jim Crow. The Gullah as a community clings to their African heritage and has solidarity, which presently tends to be lacking in other African-American communities. What seems problematic is how to incorporate consciousness into diverse communities while applying an Afrocentic theology.

Finally, the research is significant in that it brings awareness to the contributions that Igbo descended African Americans have brought to U.S. history and the World, which include their own Creole Gullah language, food, arts, agricultural skills, and a culture fully intact.

Methodology

The intertextual historiography is the methodology used because it allows for the investigation for African-American identities, communities, and continuity and way of life that serves as a healing force for those that are of African descent. The four selected texts are used to reinforce the intertextual historiography. The four texts are: Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon,* Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow,* Octavia Butler's *Kindred,* and Ralph Ellison's *Flying Home.*

Karla F. C. Holloway's analysis of three things relevant in speakerly texts or intertextual historiography, they are: revisions, (re)membrance, and recursion.[5] They

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[5] Karla F. C. Holloway, "*A Figurative Theory: A Critical Consideration of Voice, Gender and Culture,*" in *African-American Literary Criticism 1773 – 2002* (New York: Twayne Publishers: 1999) 328-38.

appear in the texts and in the story of the flying Africans throughout the history in songs, poems, stories, oral history, and imagery. Holloway prefers "studying the structure of texts" rather than taking "one theoretical approach to texts by African-American women." Holloway says

> a focus on the literary language in terms of patterns; the interaction of language, culture, community and women's voice; the roles of narrative voice and the innervoice; speakerly texts; texts of spoken memory, layering, nurturance of the spoken word within the texts-critical vision; memory recovered through language; vision and act rather than a dominant mode of storytelling.[6]

Holloway's focus on reclaiming black women writer's voice in literary texts in both America and Africa allows for "their return to the word as a generative source-a source of textual power that both structures story and absorbs its cultural legacy-is a return to the power of the word itself."[7] Text is recovered through the recursion of "literary and linguistic activit" whereby memory reunites its "meaning and source."[8] The "double-voiced," "two mouths," or "speakerly texts" of which include the process of repetition and revision and or intertextuality with language play by saying something different from what it meant.

Bruce L. Berg says, "intertextual/historiography examines the elements of history and depends mostly on language."[9]

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[6] Holloway, 328.
[7] Ibid., 329.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Bruce L. Berg, *Qualitatative Research Methods for Social Sciences,* (Boston: Pearson and AB, 2004), 265-69.

From a social science perspective, history is an account of some past event or a series of events, and historiography is interested in what happened in the past during a specified period and then how those pieces of written accounts are joined together.[10] However, Holloway initially organizes the idea of intertextual historiography through revisions. Revisions focus on the "gathering of language organization," "privilege of certain speakers," and "voice and the physical presence of the speaker" and how they are viewed within the culture; speech and voice is revised within intertextuality.[11]

Ishmael Reed calls this gathering "an oral . . . talking book" and Henry L. Gates calls it "speakerly text," and defines it as:

> A text whose rhetorical strategy is designed to represent an oral literary tradition, designed to emulate the phonetic grammatical, and lexical patterns of actual speech and produce the 'illusion of oral narration.' The speakerly text is that text in which all other structural elements seem to be devalued, as important as they remain to the telling of the tale, because the narrative strategy signals attention to its own importance, an importance which would seem to be the privileging of oral speech and its inherent linguistic features.[12]

For example, Gates describes the "speakerly text" character Janie, of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* and posits:

> Free indirect discourse is represented in this canonical text as if it were a dynamic character, with shifts in its level of diction drawn upon to reflect a certain development of self-consciousness in a hybrid character, a character who is neither the novel's protagonist nor the text's disembodied narrator, but a blend of both, an emergent and merging moment of consciousness.[13]

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[10] Berg, 233-34.
[11] Ibid., 330-31.
[12] Henry L. Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 181.
[13] Ibid., Gates, *Introduction,* xxv-xxvi; Arnett Ervin, "*Signifying/Signification,*" in *The Handbook of African-American Literature* (Gainesville: University Press, 2004), 157.

Holloway claim revision and the processes of transformation and generation as her theoretical methodology (with emphasis on language and vocabulary) and as the substantive context of the black woman's text. She also uses revision as a gender-specific instance that foregrounds gendered spheres of knowledge--- women's ways of framing and keeping that knowledge in the place of the representation of the "speaking black voice."[14] The second element is (re)membrance. (Re)membrance is centered around how the culture constructs memory and responds to myth. Holloway intertwines "myth and cultural memory" so that "memory is a tactile path toward cultural recovery," and that there are "distinct versions of memory" that oral text recovers. The authors and characters "honor the cultural memories within the word," and this is evidenced in the texts.[15] Cultural memories are seen in the character Pilate in *Song of Solomon* as she remembers and passes down the history and songs to Milkman; Avey remembers visits at the flying African's Ibo's Landing in South Carolina and the ring shout; and Joseph Lebert remembers his Grenada ancestors in an annual event. Several characters in the texts at some point remember events. Myth becomes alive as the imaginations of the writer are infused within the character.

In the texts, the cultural community is embedded with imagination from myth, memory, language, and a culture of which leads to recovery. Without these components a community would have no meaning, no memory, no consciousness. Writers who use cultural historical texts often merge reality and imagination and both the present and the past. Myth is alive with imagery, language, memory and the voices from both the past

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[14] Holloway, 330.
[15] Holloway, 331.

and present that speak within the text through voices long ago silenced. Black texts often have a double-voiced metaphor as Gates theorizes and is "central to the full explication of the canonical black text," and establishes a relationship between the spoken texts of myth and the (re)membered consciousness within the literate word.[16]

The last element is recursion, which "addresses the concepts of complexity, layering and the multiplied text."[17] Focus is on how the "Black writers' textual voices" and their "characterization within the text" use "language and layering of which create a ritualized recursive structure focusing on imagery and language."[18] Rituals, repetition, and reflexiveness are critical processes within black literary women's texts and serves as a linguistic metaphor of signifyin(g).[19] Pilate tells Milkman about the family history and he goes in search of his identity, this serves as a metaphor for flight. Flying represents for the characters in the story a return, consciousness, a metaphor, a journey, and freedom. The text and focal story come close to transforming the minds of those who have been enslaved and in them regaining their freedom only after having completed the journey towards identity.

The texts were chosen by: 1) word searching the terms flight and journey and the reasons characters were constantly moving, 2) texts were also based on flight journey in Southern states, 3) listening to interviews, reading reviews, author notes and interviews, and 4) analyzing themes and comparing similarities and differences in the usage of flight within the texts and how the texts speak to each other having a common source or a focus

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[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid., 331-32
[19] Holloway, 331-32.

on flight. The literature shows distinct recurring patterns, and the analysis is based primarily on these patterns of flight and its meaning and usage as outlined or portrayed within the texts.

Research Questions

This research poses four major questions:

1. Where is home in relationship to flight and its relationship to epic memory?
2. What is the concept of the origination of flight as utilized by the Igbos?
3. In what ways is flight transferable as reflected in the four selected texts?
4. What factors identified in flight and epic memory are reflective in the lived experiences and culture of the Gullah as revealed in the four selected texts?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is based on epic memory. Epic memory is in essence piecing together fragments of the mind that have lie dormant because of various experiences and movement from various geographic locations. Epic memory helps form cultural identity because the unconscious mind organizes and rebuilds fragments or pieces of memory. The epic is defined as

> a long narrative that emerges from an oral tradition and for centuries has been recited and passed on by griots and others. Incorporated in the narrative are historical events as well as communal values. As a model, the hero is one who in his journey and adventures seeks knowledge and mystical powers.[20]

An example of this type of narrative is Derek Walcott's *The Antilles,* Zora Neale Hurton's *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon,* Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow,* and *Kindred.*

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[20] Hazel Arnett Ervin, *"Terms"* in *African-American Literary Criticism 1773 – 2002* (New York: Twayne Publishers: 1999), 57.

Memory as creative process is ongoing, and helps to sustain or solidify community.[21] Memory played an important role while on the slave ships and it became a way to separate the mind, body, spirit, and physical locality by always knowing where home was and its importance. Mindful of the atrocities that awaited them, many on the slave ships choose death over captivity, while others chose dance and song as their beliefs blended with their new environment as a form of survival.

Molefi K. Asante, Derek Walcott, Larry Neal, August Wilson, and Henry L. Gates are the researchers who support the notion of epic memory.[22] Each of these researchers believe that memory is formulated by lived experiences based on cultural and spiritual traditions, but because memory can lay dormant it has to be retrieved over time by piecing together fragments of broken or forgotten memory. These fragments often are pulled together by storytelling or at cultural events where reenactments and recitations occur at specific locations that stimulate the imagination and awaken the memory.

In Molefi K. Asante's *The Afrocentric Ideas,* though his focus is on epic memory there are other components that are essential in keeping that memory alive. They are: memory retrieval, the spiritual dimension of experience, imagination, recitation, fragments, reenactments by faith, and location or containment, all of which are seen in the texts. Asante argues that in African and African-American artistic expression a memory retrieved delivers the "pathos, feeling, and dramatic experience without telling the literal story."[23] He believes that memory is vast and consists of imagination and

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[21] Ibid., 148-49.
[22] Molefi K. Asante's *The Afrocentric Idea,* Derek Walcott's *The Antilles*, Larry Neal notes August Wilson's "A World of Ideas," and Henry L. Gates's *The Signifying Monkey.*
[23] Molife K. Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea* (Philadelphia: Press, 1985), 80.

experience which taps into the emotional feeling realm thereby adding a spiritual dimension to the experience. So, epic memory is activated by the imagination of the mind. As one "thinks and organizes," then "records ideas and thoughts," recitation leads to commemoration, of which occur through "the image within the structure of the ethos."[24] These thoughts and ideas are fragments remembered by people removed from their culture, but who perform reenactments by faith. The fragments are there to cause the past and present to be combined so that healing and self-discovery is possible.

Derek Walcott in *The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory,* witnessed an epic dramatization in Trinidad called the *Ramleela.*[25] A duplicate of the Hindu epic the *Ramayana* was at the time considered of little significance. Further observation revealed to Walcott that he was witnessing faith in action as pieces of fragments of a peoples' history were rejoined together. Walcott argues that it was "memory that yearns to join the center, a limb remembering the body from which it was severed, like those bamboo thighs of the god."[26] Walcott was referencing the bamboo parts that made up the god. He compares these fragments to the Indians of the Antilles who performed the epic and to the Asians Indians whose epic memories have reduced to these fragments. To Walcott, memory is not a "making" but a "remaking" by piecing together the shards or cracks of fragments and the having love that makes it whole again.

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[24] Asante, 80.
[25] Derek Walcott, *The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory* in The Noble Lecture (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1993).
[26] Walcott, 1-5.

This concept is compared to poetry and how it "combines the natural and the marmoreal [likened to marble]; it conjugates both tenses simultaneously: the past and the present."[27]

Thus the Igbos of Coastal Georgia and South Carolina had imaginations and memories of Africa, so their thoughts were not illusions or figments of the mind, but rather factors impacting their desire to return *home* and remain there. Walcott questions if there is really such a thing as "imaginations wandering", or is it really the "collective memory of a race" that recalls things to the mind.[28] Walcott, as does Asante, Neal, and Gates indicates that memory must be retrieved from a memory bank stored within. The Igbo descendants, the Gullah people are more organized compared to black lived experience and their epic memory impacts how they live their lives. To the Gullah, epic memory is a necessity and a way of life that reminds them of their cultural identity and lived experiences which comes out of epic memory.

Additionally, Asante, Gates, and Neal also believe that there are commonalities that are shared among African people. Asante, says in *The African Aesthetic* that it is those commonalities and others seen within peoples such as the "Shona, Zule, Shilluk, Ewe, and Wolof that make an Ibo recognize a Kikuyu and a Jamaican recognize a Chewa and an African American recognize a Sotho."[29] In the texts, the authors write about commonalities that have influenced their lives and their ancestors' lives. It is the gathering of the broken pieces that illuminates these commonalities across cultures and

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[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Asante, *The African Aesthetic: Keeper of the Traditions,* ed. Kariamu Welsh-Asante (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1993), xiv.

allows restoration for the shattered histories although there is tonal, cultural, and language differences as also witnessed during Walcott's epic experience.

On the other hand, Larry Neal claims that the sociological linkage between the African and African-American aesthetic is an affirmation from the ancestors and an acclamation of "blood memory," a term used by playwright August Wilson, which is in essence epic memory, and that has been developed and retained in America.[30] Asante and Gates believe that the ancestors are involved in every process of African life that is barely debatable.[31] Gates names it "fragmented unity" in his discussion of the African-American literary tradition, its community, and how self-conscious believers choose to remember their history their way.[32] These specific cultural commonalities among different African aesthetics, even when natives are removed from their homelands still embrace memory awaiting to be retrieved.

Several scholars believe that one can fly home anytime in the mind and this belief is played out in the texts as Morrison, Marshall, Butler, and Ellison weave together different stories focusing on journeying via epic memory.[33] Flight as epic memory is used in the texts as the protagonists' leave home during childhood or adulthood with their memory. It is the rejoining of the memory that frees one from the struggle so that she\he can fly. In both Morrison's and Marshall's works, Pilate, Avey and Lebert fly by remembering songs, dances and storytelling and epic events such as the location of

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[30] August Wilson, "A World of Ideas," Public Broadcast Station. 1988. Accessed April 16, 2013. http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/archives/wilsonwoi_flash.html.
[31] Asante, Introduction, iii.
[32] Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, 47.
[33] Virginia Hamilton's *The People Could Fly* and Phyllis Wheatley's poem *On Imagination (1753-1784)*, also demonstrate flight.

Pilate's father's bones in a cave in Virginia and the Big Drum event and church shouting that Avey attends. In Ellison's text, Todd flies by remembering his culture and identity when his plane crashes from impact with a buzzard. Flying caused him to form a new identity as a Tuskegee Airmen similar to Avey's middle-class lifestyle, and Dana's marriage to a white man. Dana along with the others moved away from their culture, but only Avey denied her birth name, "Avatara". Butler's text, however, force Dana to recognize that her perception of reality and freedom is in her memory and then by her own strength she is able to return home at will, literally, a reality seen in all of the texts.

The four texts span between the years 1977-1996. The protagonists (re)member epic events centered around the Flying Africans legend, storytelling, identity, home, journeying, or flying whether literal or metaphysical as in Butler's text whereby Dana's flight or epic journey transcends time zones and geographic locations. Ellison's text goes further to include objects such as planes, kites, and buzzards, all representations of how epic fragments are woven into texts.

Lastly, epic memory in the texts and in relationship to the Gullah is retained within culture through remembering songs and dances such as the "Ring Dance" now called the "Ring Shout" and the Buzzard Lope. The Buzzard Lope is performed to the song "Throw Me Anywhere, Lord" and the "Ring Shout" is performed regularly in local churches by the McIntosh County Shouters, a dance very similar to the Shouters of Trinidad. At funerals, the tale of Anansi the Spider is often recited, and at annual epic events such as the Gullah Festival and The Gathering at Geechee Kunda stories are dramatized from memory retentions. Epic memory also continues within the culture via

language (coding and symbolisms), a Creole or blending of various languages found presently in West Africa and areas throughout the Diaspora such as Louisiana, Florida, Tobago, Belize and Jamaica. The Igbos had with them their memories and experiences, or epic fragments that were strength mechanisms and survival tactics that surpassed western ideology. It allowed them to return home at will, either by committing suicide, by fixed melancholy, the ability to hold one's breath and die within a few hours, or by creating a new community. Epic fragments combine the past and present.

Limitations

One limitation arose during this research. The limitation discovered is a shortage of research sources because of age hierarchy or the secrecy of the elders among the Gullah. Information is withheld from family members until they reach a certain age of maturity because first hand testimonies of lived experiences are critical to understanding the culture. Research on the Gullah ethnic groups the last ten years was aimed more towards Sierra Leone and the language connection, not necessarily the flight motif, however, indirectly there was the actual return home due to the American Colonization Society and others in their return to Africa and reconnecting with family separated by slavery. Although second-hand sources are more plentiful, it still lacks bringing new research ideals into scholarship because first-hand sources are mostly eyewitness. Because of this secrecy, outsiders come through gatekeepers for information or by sponsored spokespersons. The issue with age hierarchy is that the elders or griots (the keepers and voices of the peoples history) are dying and the younger generation is moving to the inlands for a better way of life, employment, and

education, so the old ways and keepers of the tradition will eventually become extinct or the culture will go through another serious evolution.

Chapter Origination

Chapter 1 presents an introduction to the research, statement of the problem, the significance of the study, the methodology, the research questions, conceptual framework, and limitations of the research; Chapter 2 presents a detailed overview of the literature review; Chapter 3 presents an historical description of the Gullah people; Chapter 4 presents the findings and analysis of the texts selected related to flight, and epic memory and their meanings in the analysis and interpretation in the life of the Igbos and the Gullah people, and Chapter 5 presents the conclusion and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This review on the Flying Africans legend among Coastal African Americans in Georgia and South Carolina demonstrates how flight is expressed from a sociological perspective in black literary texts and how its usage and importance in African-American communities continue today in the United States. The flight motif has great significance because it has been retold in various oral and literary forms since the early eighteenth century. The flight motif in this research essentially refers to recurring patterns or concepts that continues over a period of time. Though it might change slightly in meaning, its central idea remains the same the more others use it. Flight has been introduced in various texts or research studies, it does not specifically focus on consciousness, as does this research.

Moreover, all four selected texts demonstrate belief in flight either as a journey towards wholeness, actual flying or freedom, identity, or consciousness. Location also plays a critical role in how movement becomes central to the stories. Flight and location reminds the reader that everything has movement and does show up in other texts such as in *Demonic Grounds* and *Beloved.* In *Demonic Grounds,* location is the place where women are controlled by white male patriarchy based on race, sex, gender, and the location of their purchase or rebellion of which is critical in how women are viewed by

society. Flight and location in *Beloved* demonstrates pain, loss, remembrance, freedom, life and death. Beloved's return from the grave not only resurrected her mother's spirit, but almost sucks the very life out of her. Flight texts generally includes life, death, and rebirth. Flight also serves as a vehicle to transport people from one physical or mental location to another.

Geographic location, as presented in *Demonic Grounds* details the "Otherness, the grounds of being human, poverty, an archipelagos,[1] archipelagos of human Otherness, Les dam'nes of da la terra/the wretched of the earth, the color-line, terra nullius/land of no one."[2] Dionne Brand in her poem, *Land to Light On*, "has given up on land, to want no country, to disclose that geography is always human and that humanness is always geographic---blood, bones, hands, lips, wrists, this is your land, your planet your road, your sea---suggests that her surroundings are speakable."[3] The text indicates that geography and flight are places and things where memory both past and present are constructed. Likewise, a good example of the importance of geography was during an interview of Paule Marshall by Joyce Pettis, Marshall commented on the landscape she chose for her novel. Marshall saw the West Indies as home and the small island was more "manageable" and it was where she "found them technically to her advantage."[4] In various text spaces become important to the story as a means of demonstrating flight.

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[1] Archipelagos are groups of islands often times scattered in a body of water.
[2] Dionne Brand in her poem, *Land to Light On*, as quoted in Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 123.
[3] Ibid., Introduction: Geographic Stories, ix.
[4] Paule Marshall, 1991. A MELUS Interview: Paule Marshall, Vol 17, No. 4, Winter, 1991, 119.

The Flight Motif

Oral folkloric tradition include the flight motif as early as the eighteenth century, Marcellus Whaley's literary account of it amongst the Carolina Sea Islanders was as in going 'ome [home] by running away, frogs teaching each other how to fly, and having the wings "de good Lawd [gave] Puh [for] ridin."[5] Cadences of songs accompanied slaves in their work. They believed that singing has the ability to fulfill tedious tasks in record times. One instance of the power of singing was when several boats men left alongside the *Nancy Ann*, a wheel steamer, and arrived a full half hour earlier, covering 40 nautical miles in 4 hours instead of 4 1/2 hours. Africans believed that songs, the wind, and a sip from the demijohn resulted in supernatural endurance. Additionally, cadences were also sang or moaned to usher in newborns and to assist departing souls.[6]

Birds such as the eagle, the pigeon, the robin, the owl, and the buzzard held special significance along the Coastal Sea Islands. Birds guided the everyday lives of the people and foretold the future and the past. The owl and the peacock invoked fear and were believed to be the Devil's tool and were a sign of the grave. The buzzard, the robin, the pigeon, and the eagle were associated with dancing in a circle for ancestral remembrance, which included ushering the soul in or out of the human body. Another crucial belief was that the soul must not carry heavy loads and must depart from the body being light. Open prayers to Jedus [Jesus] often included words such as not allowing the soul to be heavy with sin so that it could rise and be separated from the Devil.

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[5] Marcellus Whaley, *The Old Types Pass: Gullah Sketches of the Carolina Sea Islands* (Boston: The Christopher Publishing House, 1925), 28, 39-40, 80, 114, 122, 151.

[6] Demijohn is whiskey.

In 1940, the aim of the Georgia Writer's Project which resulted in the text *Drums and Shadows,* was written to "dig deeper than any other work has done into certain aspects of folk culture..."among the Coastal Georgia slaves brought from Africa beginning in the mid-1700s, and to show the importance of African heritages in the United States.[7] Strong beliefs in root workers, ghosts, conjurors, and witches were commonly understood to be associated with the workings of the spirit. Belief that the spirit gave Africans the ability to *fly* back to Africa was common across various communities. Persons endowed with spiritual power were viewed to be spirit possessed by the gods, whereby they have supernatural abilities to control their mind and body, elements, and other spirits, thus, reconnecting with spiritual ancestors at will. Flight in *Drums* is *not* depicted as an allegory or something imagined instead according to the Georgia Writer's Project, humans flew as birds, disappeared by speaking words or snapping fingers, by having a black cat's bone, or having possession of waist belts.[8] Root doctors such as Dr. Buzzard, Daddy Grace, and Alexanduh possessed supernatural powers to ward off conjure, cure sicknesses, transmigrate, and transcend time with the ability to transfer that power to others. The belief in flight was not only specific to African peoples captured and brought to North America such as the Igbos (Ibos), Congolese, and Angolans who are commonly associated with the flying Africans but Cubans and Jamaicans share this belief.[9]

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[7] Georgia Writer's Project, *Drums and Shadows*: *Survival Studies among the Georgia Coastal Negroes* (Athens: Publishing in Motion, 2011), v.
[8] Georgia Writer's Project, *Drums,* 40-1, 48, 84, 125-6, 145-6, 150, 198.
[9] Esteban Montego, *The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave, MELUS, Vol. 22, No. 3 (Fall 1997), 131.*

John Bennett's publication, *All God's Chillen Had Wings,* a story also recorded in *Drums and Shadows* recaps a conversation between the grandfather of Caesar Grant of John's Island and an elder who spoke forgotten words of how to fly to slaves pending an upcoming punishment of which was avoided.[10] Bennett recalls that

> and as he spoke to them they all remembered what they had forgotten, and recalled the power which once had been theirs. Then all the Negroes, old and new, stood up together; the old man raised his hands; and they all leaped up into the air with a great shout; and in a moment . . . flying, like a flock of crows, over the field, over the fence, and over the top of the wood; and behind them flew the old man . . . But as he went over the fence he made a sign in the master's face, and cried "Kuli-ba! Kuli-ba!" I don't know what that means. But if I could only find the old wood sawyer, he could tell you more; for he was there at the time, and saw the Africans fly away with their women and children. He is an old, old man, over ninety years of age, and remembers a great many strange things.[11]

Bennett's belief after living on the island for several decades was that his work was not important enough to reach the masses but that "Gullah is only for the Chosen People" because of its content. He did not think anyone outside the Charleston community would find any use of . . . "stuff like mine . . ."[12] Bennett also expressed the notion that the foundation for the myth of flight was based on truth, actual characters and events, and that "each of the legends brings up at the other end face to face with actual events and personages, misunderstood, uncomprehended, and strangely distorted by superstition and fancy..."[13] Bennett even in this demonstrated thorough research, still doubted that others would find importance in his work.

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[10] John Bennett, *All God's Chillen Had Wings* in *Doctor to the Dead*: Grotesque Legends and Folk Tales of Old Charleston (New York: Rinehart, 1946), 139-42.
[11] Ibid., Bennett; Georgia Writer's Project, *Drums*.
[12] Bennett, Introduction: Bennett and Friends, vii.
[13] Ibid., An Introductory Comment, xxv.

Moreover, critical to the flight motif was the Africans' desire to return home during the 17th and 18th centuries while onboard Middle Passage voyages. Belief that the Igbo slaves in America committed suicide was associated with the folklore of flying back to Africa or disappearing. Captain Phillips of the *Hannibal* explained that "tis their belief that when they die they return home to their country and friends again."[14] Almost one hundred years after the *Hannibal's* voyage, Eroide Claxton, a surgeon who attended a shipload of Ibos recalled that "some of the slaves wished to die on an idea that they should then get back to their own country."[15] Also Captain John Smith onboard the ship *Elizabeth,* and whose assignment it was to whip the slaves recalled that "even in the act of chastisement," "I have seen them look up at me with a smile," and, in their own language, say, 'presently we shall be no more.'[16]

Daniel Mannix and Malcolm Cowly believed that the shock of being removed from one's homeland was comparable with physical injury, and many never reached the Americas because the Africans would "will themselves to death" or jump overboard.[17] Likewise, during an interview with Joyce Pettis, Marshall explained her belief in returning home. When asked about her references to the Caribbean in her fictions Marshall explains that her work in the West Indies started before she first visited her homeland at nine years old.

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[14] Daniel P. Mannix, *Black Cargoes: A History of the Atlantic Slave Trade: 1510-1865* (New York: Viking Press, 1962) 117-18.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Daniel P. Mannix and Malcom Cowley, The Middle Passage in *Historical Viewpoints: Notable Articles from American Heritage, Volume One to 1877*, no. 5 (1970): 110-11. Edited by John A. Garraty.
[17] Mannix and Cowley, *Black Cargoes*, 34, 117-18, 120, 127.

Marshall commented that:

> One of the things that was talked a lot about among the women was the whole nostalgic memory of home as they called it, home. It was very early on that I had a sense of a very distinct difference between *home,* which had to do with the West Indies, and *this country* which had to do with the United States. For a while it was a little confusing because to me home was Brooklyn and by extension America, and yet there always was this very strong sense in the household of this other place that was also home. I think that it began then, an interest in this place that was so important to these women and that I began to sense it was important in whomever I was going to discover myself to be . . . and really in a sense that's what the work is primarily about; it's my trying to find answers I'm always putting to myself.[18]

On the other hand Marshall believed that writing had always been there waiting to be written based on "especially that seminal experience in the kitchen as a little girl, listening to my mother and her friends tell stories and talk about the world, and political issues and so on . . . Also, I wanted to see if I had the same power with language that I sensed the mothers possessed."[19] Marshall's writing found in her numerous fictional texts based on what she experienced and felt from the women at home.

However, Dr. Lorenzo D. Turner's, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect,* provide a contribution to the study of the Coastal Africans and the importance of the flight motif in language.[20] Language is central because it associates the words "shout" or "saut" with spirituals and dancing. "Shout" and "saut" are often sung in spirituals with the movement of the body, while dancing in a counterclockwise direction or circle, hands clapping and feet stomping. This circular movement allows the participant to reconnect with the ancestors. The utilization of flight in language can be used as an empowerment

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[18] Paule Marshall, 1991. A Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States (MELUS) Interview.
[19] Marshall, Interview, 119.
[20] Lorenzo D. Turner, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (Chicago: Chicago Press, 1949).

force or as a humanizing force that codes words inside quilts, songs, literature, and rituals. It is oral accounts such as in *Drums and Shadows* and texts of Whaley and Turner that more recent authors such as Toni Morrison, Paule Marshall, Octavia Butler, Ralph Ellison and others began to enhance upon the flight motif and its spiritual connotation.

Moreover, Virginia Hamilton, in *The People Could Fly,* believes and dedicates her entire book to the Africans who did not escape to freedom, but that the tale "almost" make us believe that the people could fly. Though she and others includes secret codes, words, and passwords such as "*buba yali ... buba tambe....*" and "*KumKum kunda yali, kum...tabre!"* which are seen in various forms in African literature, Hamilton suggests the meaning as being, "Come fly away!" or perhaps as a wish-fulfillment motif.[21] Such accounts are often combined with hard work and cruelty that encourages runaways and rebellions. The magic hoe was also believed to be associated with the flying African tales and once spoken too, it had the power to work automatically. Undoubtedly, this ability was relief for those who were unable to fly.

African novels and dialogue have become a topic of discussion in literary circles, and instead of having limited dialogues or gleaning from European writers Africans have developed their own style. Gloria Onyeoziri-Miller's review of Ode Ogede's book says, "African writers are avid readers and imitators of other African writers."[22] Ogede

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[21] Virginia Hamilton, *The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 166-73.

[22] Gloria Onyeoziri-Miller. "*Intertextuality in Contemporary African Literature: Looking Forward* (review)." Research in African Literatures 43.3 (2012): 140-41. *Project MUSE*. Web. 27 Jan. 2013. <http://muse.jhu.edu/>.

suggests that Africans include in their writings geography, language, ethnicity, gender, age, and even politics. Intertextuality is a creative process fundamental to the way that African literature reproduces itself over time based on the source text or master text and its intertextual counterpart. Literary models do not universalize African literary traditions, but have facilitated the circulation of ideas, techniques, and styles.[23] The researcher perceives the borrowing and intertextual approach as a way of continuing cultural survival.

Toni Morrison adds that the manner in which she writes was influenced by a writing group she became a part of while teaching at Howard. They challenged her to go beyond "high school essays."[24] In the 1960s, black men Morrison felt, was going to skip over the hurt and various forms of racism. In addition, Morrison indicated that physical characteristics were portrayed against individuals with darker complexions. She wanted to write about the forgotten or overlooked, the black female children.

Another variation of flight was the transmigration or human transportation by animals. The buzzard and alligator motif serves as vehicles for human transportation transcending space and time. In Hamilton's *The People Could Fly* text, flight is depicted as either freedom earned by trickery, riddles, or escaping, or as human transportation associated with the transmigration of the soul or reincarnation.[25]

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[23] Onyeoziri-Miller, "*Intertextuality in Contemporary African Literature: Looking Forward* (review)."
[24] Morrison, 2013. Interview. Video. Video – Toni Morrison talks about Her Motivation for writing http://gotheretoknowthere.blogspot.com/2013/04/toni-morrison-ancestor-is-foundation.html. Accessed May 22, 2014. Toni Morrison: The Ancestor is Foundation.
[25] Hamilton, "*John and the Devil's Daughter: and other Tales of the Supernatural* and *Carrying the Running-Aways: and other Slave Tales of Freedom*" in *The People Could Fly,* 105-33; 139-66.

John's ride on the wings of the witch's eagle because he has no transportation could be juxtaposed to other scholarly works such as *Drums and Shadows,* Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust,*[26] and Daniel P. Mannix's and Malcolm Cowley's *Black Cargoes,*[27] where the soul temporarily leaves the body, but sometimes is unable to return. Dr. Robin Russell, a doctor in a Charleston tale, borrowed a dying man's soul for an hour and died of it, however, Bennett was unable to confirm this tale.[28]

A somewhat similar story is told in Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* when as a young woman, Eula, Elizabeth's mother, was raped and her soul left her body and looked down upon her from atop a tree until danger was over.[29] This incident in the text indicates a common belief in the soul's ability to take flight at will, even during impure acts or for protection. The text provide information that declares the ability of the soul to depart from a living body transcending locality is widespread and gives credence to the spiritual power of the Africans. In essence, whether or not by transmigration or by actually running away, those individuals involved were escaping from a reality perceived in their minds. Central in African cultures was the sense of spirituality and belief in a higher power that transcends perceptions and rational ideals because of the level of consciousness.

Joyce Pettis in *Towards Wholeness in Paule Marshall's Fiction,* also situate flight, the circular journey or return as a physical manifestation of consciousness or

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[26] Julie Dash, *Daughters of the Dust* (New York: Penguin Group, 1999), 103; Bennett, An Introductory Comment in *Doctor to the Dead*, xxiv.
[27] Georgia Writer's Project, *Drums*, 27-28, 130; Mannix and Cowley, 117-18, 120; Zora Neale Hurston, High John de Conquerer in *The Sanctified Church* (Berkeley: Turtle Island Foundation, 1981), 33, 69, 78.
[28] Bennett, An Introductory Comment, xxiv.
[29] Ibid., Dash, 262-63.

self-awareness that is played out individually or in communal gatherings. The journey is literal and metaphorical.[30] A major part of African culture is movement in a ring during ceremonies honoring the ancestors and elders who guide the participants back to self-awareness. This manifestation of consciousness brings forth internal struggle that often includes taking oaths and partaking in gatherings where symbolic meanings are drawn on the ground for understanding. The ritual serves as communal cohesiveness and understanding of the life above and below the ground of water or river where the ancestors live.

It is important to note that the circle is used also during rites of passage and marriage ceremonies. Researchers such as Sterling Stuckey, Robert F. Thompson, and Marshall Stearns have been witnesses of this West African circle dance, a version of which has evolved in the South known as the ring shout.[31] During the 1950's while in South Carolina, Stearns noticed that the shout varied a bit by including spirit possession. The dancers formed the usual circle with persons back to back shuffling in a counter-clockwise direction with outstretched arms and hunched shoulders. Those standing with their backs to the wall clapping hands and stomping their feet created a "unique rhythm," and "were overtaken by spirit possession" as they screamed and spun around in the circle, "in religious hysteria, like corn starting to pop over a hot fire..."[32]

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[30] Joyce Pettis, *The Journey Completed: Spiritual Regeneration in Praisesong for the Widow* in Towards Wholeness in Paule Marshall's Fiction (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1995), 106-35.
[31] Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture*: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 3-97, p 17, note 37, page 362; Robert F. Thompson, and J. Cornet, *Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, (28, 54); Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art & Philosophy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 10-11.
[32] Marshall Stearns, *The Story of Jazz,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 12-13, 18.

Stearns witnessed a customary spiritual ritual that demonstrated communal participants reconnecting with their ancestors both in this world and the underworld. Willingness and individual and collective participation in the circular journey brings balance between the struggle of the mental and physical states of being. Phillis Wheatley, a poet from the 18th century believed that she could go home in her mind anytime she desired. She was born in Gambia, Africa, and brought to America on the slave ship, *The Phillis,* then sold to the Wheatley's in Boston. The poems she wrote about imagination clearly spoke of her desire to return home. She later becomes the first African American to publish a book.

Pettis concludes that journeying towards wholeness and consciousness in these texts begins with storytelling, then the journey towards self-realization that includes intervention by the elders, and reuniting with the community. Respect for the elders and their involvement in keeping the old ways is what Dash demonstrates when she uses Elizabeth "Lil' Bet" and Miz Emma Julia to perform the proper burial of the deceased and help "... dem go home" after their bones were found dumped in a shallow grave. The completion of the journey is ones ability to fly or return home. Interestingly, Amelia and Lil Bet in *Daughters of the Dust*, and Avey in *Praisesong for the Widow* are just a few examples of African women in flight texts who are keepers of cultural memory.

Identity

Similar to flight texts are films such as *Daughters of the Dust* carrying the same name as the novel, *Sankofa,*[33] *The Language You Cry In,* and *Family Across the Sea,* where self-awareness is crucial to survival.[34] Each film includes a desire to go home, the journey towards reclaiming one's identity, and self-awareness after the communal reconnection, hence the return home. Likewise, bird imagery such as 'the bird of passage' and the 'buzzard' both transported humans home. The memory of home, and words spoken but now remembered, are all common motifs of being consciously aware. Home in each of these films was Africa, but before arriving there physically, home was in memory. Home was a specific location where members were known by their names, which is of a critical factor in self-identity.

Identity in the texts serves as a constant reminder of who a person is and his or her connection to a collective group of people in a specific geographic area. Identity in the texts appeared in various forms with various meanings, from biblical names to metaphors, or symbols that portrayed specific meanings such as Pilate, Sing, Milkman, Macon Dead, First Corinthians, Magdalene, Avatara, Joseph, and Mr. Golla Mack. Boats with names such as the *Bianca Pride* and the *Robert Fulto* that Avey took to the Big Drum had significance. Also in D*aughters of the Dust* names were descriptive of personalities, such as the Unborn Child, Elizabeth, called Lil' Bet, the Peazant family,

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[33] *Haile Gerima, Sankofa, DVD, Mypheduh Films; Negod-Gwad Productions (Ghana: National Commission on Culture), Channel Four (Great Britain) 1993? 1:25.*

[34] Alvaro Toepke and Angel Serrano, *The Language You Cry In* (California Newsreel (Firm) 1998), 00:53, Robert Woodruff Library, Atlanta University, Atlanta, GA; South Carolina ETV, *Family Across the Sea,* Producer Tim Carrier, Editors: Elaine Cooper, Mary Taylor, Tim Carrier, (1990), SCETV Commission, 57:20, accessed November, 2012, www.folkstreams.net/film/166.

Sugarnun the lover man, Miss Evangeline, MyOwn who remembered home constantly, Haagar, Amos, Rebecca, Miz Emma Julia the story teller, Yellow Mary, who has a white father, and Pharo Harris. Naming within the texts represented a situation or experience oftentimes more than the naming itself.

CHAPTER 3

WHO ARE THE GULLAH PEOPLE?

The Gullah speaking ethnic groups along the Coastal Sea Islands of Georgia and South Carolina are direct descendants of rice plantation slave workers from West Central Africa, which is modern day Nigeria. The Gullah-Geechee is a distinct African-American group in the United States that has maintained most of its ethnic and cultural history. During the 1700s, Africans brought over to cultivate rice, cotton, and indigo eventually made Georgia and South Carolina the wealthiest colonies in the New World.[1] Along with the Europeans' unfamiliarity with crop cultivation, swampy climate conditions, and diseases, the Africans and Europeans were separated, which allowed the Gullah to develop and sustain their own language, identity, and culture that have survived over two centuries.

The Gullah

Gullah ethnic groups, an estimate of 200,000 to 500,000 peoples, have preserved a unique history in the southeastern part of the United States. The Gullah have maintained major parts of their identity, spirituality, customs, culture, and traditions that have been linked directly to African ancestors. The Gullahs are often associated with the coastal people of Florida and South Carolina because of regional locations, language, and

[1] Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida, North Carolina and Alabama followed in the mid-19th century.

speech kinship. The Gullah derived their name from the Gola, Angola/Congolese in southern Sierra Leone near Liberia. Likewise, the Geechee of South Carolina are believed to have derived its name from either the KISSI, pronounced Geezee, a Sierra Leonean ethnic group in the north near Guinea or from the Ogeechee River, a 294-mile long blackwater river, which is in close proximity to Savannah, Georgia. The Gullah are well known among the coast for their distinctive basket creation and sewing abilities, famous red rice cuisines, okra soup, multi-colored garments, music, dances such as the Buzzard Lope and Ring Shout, and Creole language that can be found in West Africa and areas throughout the Diaspora such as Louisiana, Florida, Tobago, Belize and Jamaica.

The urgency for laborers during the 1700s among North American planters caused by agricultural needs created a huge demand for various African indigenous groups in the South. West Africa was a major focus as well as Senegambia and Sierra Leone, called the "Rice Coast" or "Windward Coast." Planters of South Carolina and Georgia focused mostly on the ethnicity of slaves from Biafra, now southeastern Nigeria, Cameroon, and Gabon. When the first groups of captives arrived in Charles Town (Charleston), South Carolina in the mid-1600s they had already undoubtedly gone through the seasoning process in the West Indies where the "breaking" of slaves took place to remove their identity. However, later groups of captives came directly from the Coast and were able to maintain most of their culture and tradition. Once on the plantations, the tedious tasks of working uncultivated fields and swamps very similar to Sierra Leone and the yellow fever and malaria unintentionally brought into the Americas caused forced isolation from mainstream European society. This isolation cultivated the

blended community of various ethnic groups such as Angola, Vai, Mende, and Igbo who shared many practices and beliefs that often led to secret communications and rebellions. Rebellions by the slaves on the Sea Islands were the most feared behavior.

In the early eighteenth and nineteenth century, a large number of Africans arrived in the Georgetown District, the center of the Low Country, making it the richest and most diversified colony in North America. The Africans in this District almost tripled that of the Europeans by 2,441, outnumbering them 2:1 with 75% of the total population being Africans, and because of the rice cultivation skills and indigo familiarity, planters preferred Africans from Senegal-Gambia, the Windward Coast, and Congo-Angolan regions of West Africa. Charles Joyner, in *Shared Tradition: Southern History and Folk Culture,* estimates that enslaved Africans brought to South Carolina between 1730 and the end of the legal slave trade was, 40 percent from Angola, 20 percent from Senegambia, and 40 percent from the Windward and Gold coasts, Sierra Leone, and elsewhere.[2] These Africans brought with them various cultures and traditions that are seen even presently along the Coastal Islands.

The Gullah have a special attachment to community and land. The Gullah believe in unity, occupations close to home, polygamous marriage, rites of passage, and is a matrilineal society, with women playing a vital role in cultural preservation. The attachment to land was probably passed down by African ethnic groups such as the Igbos and descendants of the 200 enslaved Barbadians, the first inhabitants to the South Carolina colony, present day Charleston, who accompanied Governor Sir John Yeamans

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[2] Charles Joyner, *Shared Tradition: Southern History and Folk Culture* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 205-06.

in 1671. The Igbos of Nigeria believed that "The land belongs to the many – the living, the dead and the unborn."[3]

John Njoku in *The Igbos of Nigeria,* states that

> probably the most universal element which defines a person's membership in a tribe is the feeling of belonging with certain others to a particular group. This feeling is shared by people who usually speak the same language, practice common customs, subscribe to common beliefs and values, uphold the same political systems an sometimes, believe that they are descended from a common ancestor.[4]

The Coastal Sea Islands and Gullah Wars

The Gullah connection to the trans-Atlantic slave trade dates back to the 17th and 18th centuries when the first English-speaking settlement was established in South Carolina, known as the Low Country. The Sea Islands of Georgia, South Carolina, and Florida consist of about 100 tidal and barrier islands on the Atlantic Coast in the United States. The warm and tropical climates were suitable for growing rice and indigo already familiar to West Africans along the Windward Coast, particularly Sierra Leone, which was very similar geographically. The land was humid and full of marsh, swamp, and forest terrain. Flooding of the plains, mosquitoes, and diseases were dangerous to Europeans on the plantations, so they left their farms to be managed by overseers.

The Low Country (tidal water region) extends from the Sandhills of South Carolina, just east of Columbia to the coast and includes counties such as Beaufort, Jasper, Hampton, Colleton, Charleston, Berkeley, and Dorchester. Horry County is the home of Myrtle Beach and Conway and is often referred to as the Grand Strand, near the

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[3] John E. Eberegbulam Njoku, *The Igbos of Nigeria: Ancient Rites, Changes and Survival* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 165.
[4] Njoku, 138-39.

Pee Dee area. The Low Country is where the first imports of slaves arrived, where the large plantation homes with elegant colonial style living of the Middletons, the Draytons, and the Pinckneys resided, who were all prominent, political families from the Charles Town area. (See Figures 1-3).

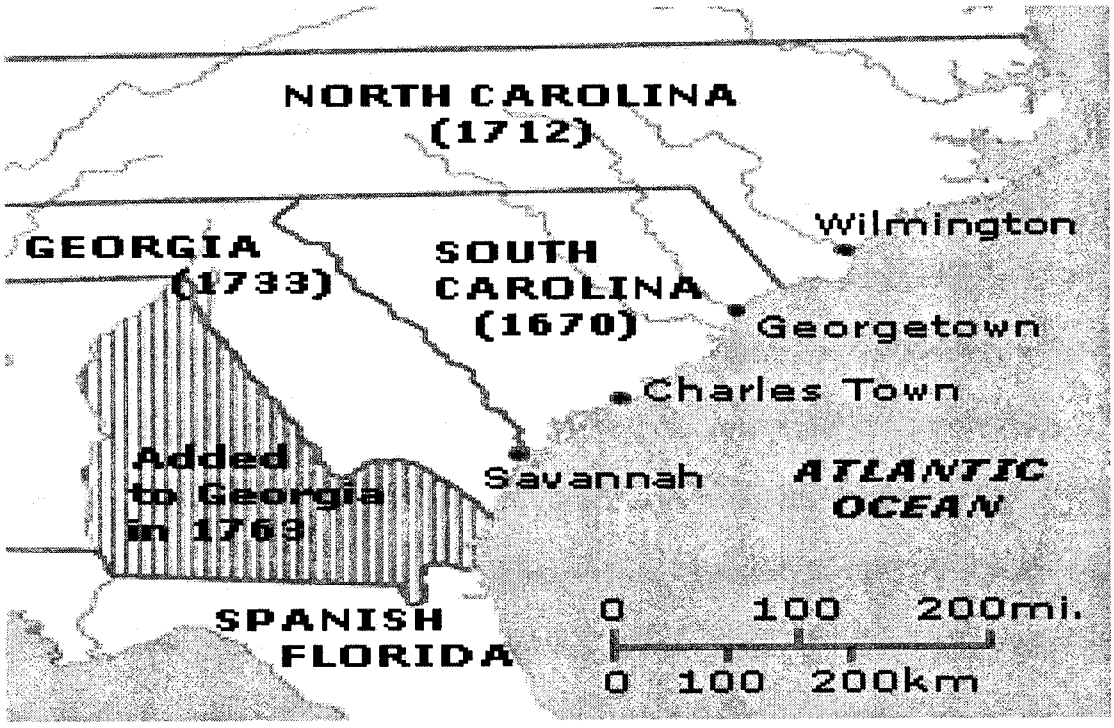

Figure 1. *South Carolina Low Country Map*. Carolina was split into two colonies in 1712 creating the North Carolina colony.

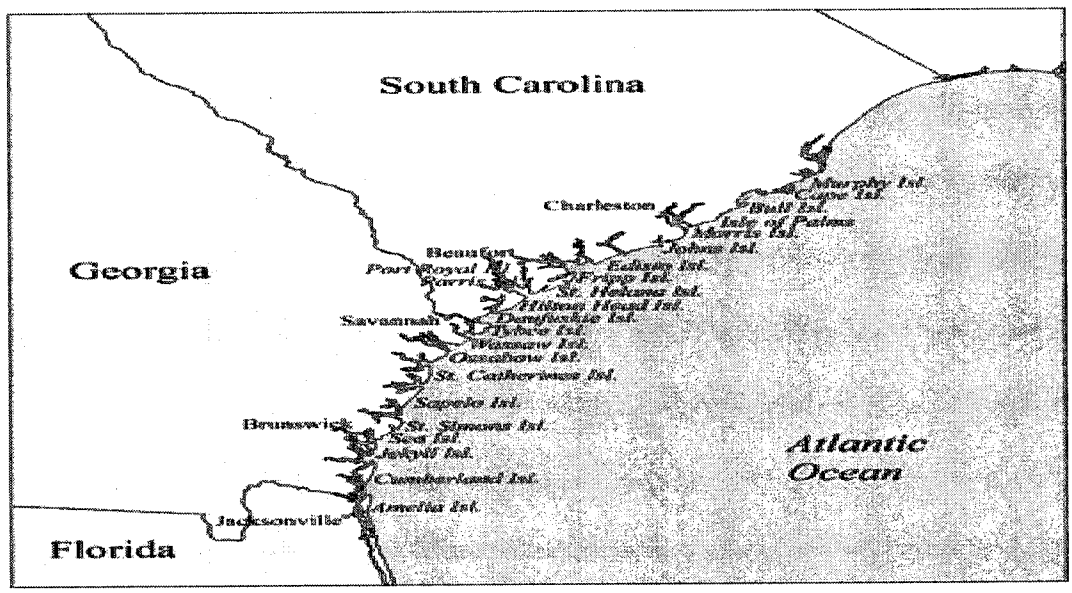

Figure 2. *Sea Islands of Costal South Carolina, Georgia and Florida.* Charles Towne, present day Charleston, South Carolina was a major port for importation of illegal slaves.

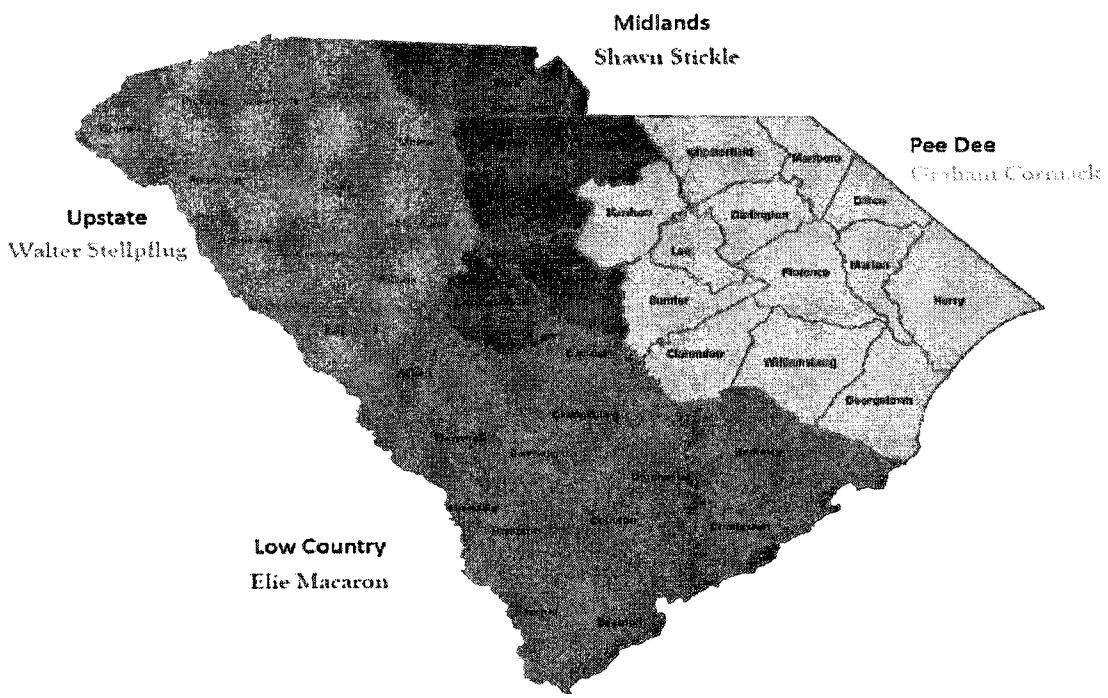

Figure 3. *Regions of South Carolina's Low Country.* Regions includes Beaufort, Jasper, Hampton, Colleton, Charleston, Berkeley, and Dorchester, etc.

The economic wealth England desired soon became a reality when South Carolina planters discovered that rice, an Asian import, would grow on their semi-tropical coastal plains. Rice first reached South Carolina's Charles Town colonies in the late 1680s supposedly from Madagascar, and after learning the trade from Africans, planters began exporting over four hundred thousand pounds of rice annually by 1700.[5] Rice was called "Carolina Gold." With the agricultural skills of the Africans, rice production increased from 1.5 million pounds in 1710 to over 20 million pounds by 1720.[6] Tidal flows, mill water gates, and tidal-powered rice mills used to flood coastal rice fields increased the production of rice to about 80 million pounds a year, half of which was consumed while the other half was exported outside North America around 1780. During the 1800s, the Low Country was the wealthiest colony in North America. However, during the years of the Civil War, the abolishment of slavery in 1865, and the need for capital put insurmountable stress on rice production amongst U.S. rice industries. Steam power in Louisiana along the Mississippi and its increased rice production squandered South Carolina's and Georgia's economic fame between 1865 and 1880, then New Orleans became the new rice powerhouse, and eventually caused the collapse of rice production along the Sea Islands.

In 1798, the Georgia Constitution banned all slaves imported directly from Africa because of diseases such as yellow fever and malaria brought by the captives. However, Africans continued to be imported and enslaved well after the Civil War. Diseases

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[5] USA Rice Federation: Facts about USA Rice. Accessed November 1, 2012. http://www.usarice.com/doclib/157/3366.pdf.
[6] Ibid.

coupled with the humid and damp Sea Island plantations were deadly to white residents. Planters rearranged their work schedules during rainy seasons when the spread of diseases was more susceptible, and left in charge agents, overseers, and drivers who controlled daily production and minimized uprisings. Enslaved Africans ostracized from mainstream society proved vital for their sustainability.

Additionally, the Gullah Wars and uprising were sparked by human cruelty and impartial government rule against the Gullahs and the Seminoles. As early as the 1700s, there were over one hundred thousand black runaways. Marquetta Goodwine says, "runaways from South Carolina began arriving in St. Augustine, Florida as early as 1687,"[7] and again during the Stono Rebellion of 1739, and during the two Seminole Wars that range from 1814 to 1858. The slaves fled to the swamps of Spanish Florida and formed an alliance with the Creeks and Seminoles, Native Americans. Their names mean "runaway." In 1822, Denmark Vesey's Revolt was significant because over nine thousand Gullahs supported him.[8] During the Second Seminole War (1835-1842), Seminole Indian Chief, Osceola, was put in prison at Fort Moultrie for refusal to move to Indian Territory (present day Oklahoma), while those captured with him escaped to freedom. When Major General Thomas Sidney Jesup captured him he declared, "This . . . is a Negro, not an Indian War."[9]

Since the early 1950s, the focus of the wars simply shifted to land piracy. The beautiful Sea Islands appealed to developers who destroyed Gullah communities for

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[7] Marquetta Goodwine, *The Gullah War* in *The Legacy of Ebo Landing: Gullah Roots of African American Culture* (Atlanta: Clarity Press, 1998), 168.
[8] Ibid., 36.
[9] Ibid., 42.

resorts, sand mining, and retirement homes. Local tax authorities raised taxes in Gullah communities, sometimes by 300% in one year. Hilton Head Island and Sea Pines Island with luxurious resorts and golf courses was built with bridges for mobility. The freedmen's ability to live off the land and become self-sufficient made relocating outside the community or paying higher taxes critical to survival because they had no economic advantage, had limited mobility, and community support was crucial.

Relationships after the Abolishment of Slavery

The differences in how Africans and Europeans viewed politics and economics along the Sea Islands was demonstrated by the Africans' fight for freedom of rights and land after the abolishment of slavery, Europeans fought to keep them in slavery by such actions as hired hands on plantations who were to keep their crops, and to minimize uprisings. When Abraham Lincoln was elected as President in 1861, South Carolina was the first to secede from the Union. Many whites thought that blacks would attempt to "Africanize" their society and culture. Africans during that time comprised the majority in most areas, especially the George-town District (Horry, Dillon, Marion, Florence, and Winyah).[10] A number of blacks left the area with their white owners as Union troops occupied the Beaufort region and military ships packed Charleston and Savannah ports. However, those slaves who remained were the first "freed slaves" after the war.

During Reconstruction, 1865-1877, African Americans found themselves overshadowed by South Carolina's "Black Codes." These codes imposed semi-slavery rules on the Africans and denied them once again human equality and full citizenship.

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[10] Winyah became present day Georgetown in 1734.

According to Ellis P. Oberholtzer,

> persons of color contracting for service were to be known as "servants," and those . . . contracted, as "masters." On farms the hours of labor would be from sunrise to sunset daily, except on Sunday. The Negroes were to get out of bed at dawn. Absentees on Sunday must return to the plantation by sunset. House servants were to be at call at all hours of the day and night on all days of the week. They must be "especially civil and polite to their masters, their masters' families and guests", and they in return would receive "gentle and kind treatment." Corporal and other punishment was to be administered only upon order of the district judge or other civil magistrate. A vagrant law of some severity was enacted to keep the negroes from roaming the roads and living the lives of beggars and thieves.[11]

During Reconstruction, at the first sign of cease fire by Commodore DuPont's regime, the whites and many house slaves left the plantations for the mainland believing that serving the master who showed various forms of kindness was not as bad as starting over. The Freedmen who remained were given false Titles and Deeds to abandoned land in their search for a better life.

On January 16, 1865, after the failure of Reconstruction, Major General William T. Sherman's Special Field Orders, No. 15's appeal to the freedmen, Sherman was of the Mississippi Military Headquarters Division, and stated that freedmen would be entitled to settle on land comprising of "The islands from Charleston, south, the abandoned rice fields along the rivers for thirty miles back from the sea, and the country bordering the St. Johns river, Florida, are reserved and set apart for the settlement of the Negroes. . ."[12] In addition, each freed African would be proportioned "40 acres and a mule," the enlisted Negroes would be paid, fed, and clothed, and if three Negroes wished to settle on any particular piece of land, each would be head of his own household.

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[11] Ellis P. Oberholtzer, *A History of the United States since the Civil War, Vol. 1* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), 128–29.
[12] W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Maryland: Arc Manor, 2008), 22.

Sherman's Special Field Order was short lived because President Andrew Jackson, in 1869, rescinded it and gave the land back to its white owners, which in words only gave the Gullah coastal lands from Charleston to Florida.[13] This rescinding of Sherman's Order indicated that there was a clear demarcation of how cultural views were understood and misunderstood between whites and blacks. The quick reversal of land ownership caused bitterness between the whites and blacks and encouraged blacks to relocate to other parts of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. The ten thousand slaves who remained mostly fought for their own livelihood by looting, being the first to join the Army, and fighting for equal wages. Others were assisted by "The Port Royal Experiment," which provided clothing, shelter, and education for the freedmens.[14] This group from Boston and New York was called the "Gideonites" and prior to this time, education was prohibited among Blacks. A misunderstanding of cultural views between whites and blacks continued along South Georgia's Coast. Today, the younger generations are migrating to the mainland seeking education, employment, and a better way of life. The fact that the elders, holders of the tradition, are passing away and the young are leaving, the Gullah communities are slowly becoming extinct because of this exodus.

The Gullah and Igbo Connection

The illegal importation of slavery-bound Africans continued when a group of about 400 captives including Igbos, arrived on the Georgia coast at Dunbar Creek

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[13] DuBois, 22.
[14] Goodwine, 167; Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal For Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), xi - xiv.

onboard the schooner *York* in May 1803. The Igbos, known as the Flying Africans, had been captured by the Aro-Chukwu clan in late 1802 and sold to traders along the Coast of Guinea, bound for Skidaway Island near Savannah. Named for their rebellion at *Ebos (Ibos) Landing* in South Carolina, the Igbo descendants in the Harrington community of St. Simon's Island, who gave first-hand accounts of the story, are accredited for giving the landing its name.[15]

Today, Dunbar Creek is bordered off by fencing because of private property ownership, yet, the Gullah, still hold on to customs and tradition that were customary to Igbos of southeastern Nigeria. The Igbos were known to be ferocious warriors, unruly, suicidal, and in rebellion, always left a distinctive mark. Survivors of the *York* were taken to Sapelo Island and Cannon's Point on St. Simon's Island, the location of the Harringtons. Today, the largest gathering of Gullah residents is on Sapelo Island in Hog Hammock. Although a ban on the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade was active in 1808, African captives were imported directly into Savannah ports as late as November 28, 1858 when the schooner *Wanderer* was seized with about 409 captives including Igbos when it crashed ashore near Jekyll Island/St. Simon's Island. Captain and owner William G. Corrie along with his twelve-man crew and eight passengers purchased these captives from Ambriz, Angola, mostly Bakongo between October 11th and 17th, 1858.[16]

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[15] H. A. Sieber, "The Factual Basis of the Ebo Landing Legend," (1989), accessed March 21, 2012, http://www.biafraland.com/Igbo%20Landing,%20factual%20Basis.htm.
[16] Tom Henderson Wells, *The Slave Ship Wanderer* (Athens: The University of Georgia, 1967), 9, 11, 20.

The *Wanderer* was originally outfitted as a racing yacht but was converted into a slave vessel while its crew waited ten days in the Congo building a slave deck and making preparation for their cargo.[17] Upon arriving at Cumberland lighthouse, near Jekyll Island, James Clubb, the pilot, on the morning of November 29th saw "about *fifty filthy* Negroes lying on the afterdeck. The Africans appeared listless and emaciated but showed not signs of maltreatment or restraint. They were a weird looking lot; most had their teeth filed, some carried tribal tattoos on forehead or chest. Several had peculiarly shaped heads or jaws and most were entirely naked,"[18] Clubb continued by claiming that

> among the cargo were only a few grown men and women. Most were boys twelve to eighteen years old. After disembarking they squatted or lay around campfires speaking an unintelligible tongue which contained some Spanish or Portuguese words.... And from the hold where hundreds of Negroes had lain on temporary decks too close together to permit them to stand erect and without sanitary facilities at all there rose an unbearable stench. The yacht was alive with cockroaches. . .[19]

Dr. Robert Hazelhurst's examination found them "suffering from nothing worse than diarrhea, dietary deficiencies, and skin diseases. None died in his care."[20] During the period between December 4th and 17th, about half of the 170 captives were sent to the Tillman plantation near Hamburg in the Edgefield section of South Carolina and to the plantation of Robert L. Butler.

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[17] Ibid., 19.
[18] Henderson, *The Slaves are Landed,* 27.
[19] Ibid., 28.
[20] Ibid.

The area near Butler's plantation was "a principal slave-trading center for the Southeast and utilization of it would facilitate further distribution," and the remaining Negroes were distributed quietly from the Jekyll Island area.[21] The *Wanderer* was the last known illegal schooner in the United States.

The Gullah and West African Language Connection

Dr. Lorenzo Turner made a pivotal discovery among the Gullah when he recorded a song that resulted in similarities found in Mende and Via funeral practices. He was able to trace over four thousand words and names directly linked to African languages, and several Gullah residents still remembered phrases in Mende songs and stories. Many were able to count to almost twenty in the Guinea/Sierra Leone dialect of Fula.[22] Joseph A. Opala recalls British historian P.E.H. Hair's comments, "that all of the African text known to be preserved by the Gullah is in languages spoken in Sierra Leone."[23] This contribution undoubtedly extends from the previous work of Dr. Turner.

Along the Coastal Sea Islands, it is almost impossible to visit and not notice the language of the Gullah. The Gullah language originated after several African ethnic groups blended dialects, symbols, and gestures along with Standard English to communicate. This language forms a Creole, or Krio as it is termed in Sierra Leone where Gullah ancestors have been traced. During the mid-nineteenth century as well as today, this language is very familiar among the Sea Islanders and its visitors.

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[21] Ibid., 29.
[22] Lorenzo D. Turner, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (Chicago: Chicago Press, 1949).
[23] Joseph A. Opala, "The Gullah: Rice, Slavery, and the Sierra Leone-American Connection," accessed June 6, 2012, http://www.yale.edu/glc/gullah/author.htm; P.E.H. Hair, "Sierra Leone Items in the Gullah Dialect of American English," Sierre Leone Language Review 4 (1965), 79-84; West African Origins of the Gullah\Geechee South Carolina & Georgia, USA. http://wysinger.homestead.com/southcarolina.html.

Edward King said during a visit to the Sea Islands that, "Gullah is a language that slaves along coastal Georgia and South Carolina created," and "The lowland Negro of South Carolina has a barbaric dialect," that when he speaks "The English words seem to tumble all at once from his mouth, and to get sadly mixed whenever he . . . speak."[24] Gullah has not been a popular language among mainland locals or even the younger generations who chose to be educated at public schools and move away from their heritage because of differences.

Gullah Creole emerged in the New World from an earlier pidgin with similarities found in naming and pronouns traced to Igbo, Ga, and Yoruba villages, says Charles Joyner in *Down by the Riverside*.[25] This Creole was spoken at all Saints Parish Waccamaw rice field, located in Pawley's Island, South Carolina, where thirty-five plantations bordered the Georgetown-Horry County line on the north side.[26] Linguistically, the study of how the Gullah derived at its pidgin and Creole language should not be viewed as African-American Ebonics, which has been given a negative connotation. In order for a language to be considered Pidgin, it must have no native speakers, thus a second language, but forms when various groups need to communicate. Whenever this newly created "native" language is passed on to succeeding generations, it becomes a Creole.

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[24] Edward King, *The Great South*: *A Record of Journeys* (Hartford: American Publishing, 1878), 429.
[25] Charles Joyner, *Gullah* in *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 196.
[26] Joyner., 198.

Joyner continues the discussion by stating that

> since Creole languages must serve all the functions of a language, not just the limited linguistic interactions for which pidgins are devised, Creole languages expanded rapidly in complexity in succeeding generations. This intricate process in which a language based upon the convergence of other languages undergoes expansion in both use and form is called creolization.[27]

Joyner demonstrates this creolization process by using two West African languages in the Senegal-Gambia region, Wolof and Mandingo, of which he claim provided the foundation for the Creole language. During the time of the trans Atlantic slave trade, several ethnic groups who spoke various languages communicated by using "similar linguistic patterns" while others during the Middle Passage and on plantations used body and sign language. Some even learned the master's vocabulary and used it to their advantage to gain leverage over the master and their people. Joyner also believes that pidgin languages are common throughout the Diaspora:

> Afro-Dutch pidgin in the Virgin Islands; Afro-Portuguese pidgin in Brazil and Curacao; Afro-Spanish pidgins in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Columbia; Afro-French pidgins in Louisiana, French Guiana (influenced by Portuguese), Haiti, Guadeloupe, Grenada, and other Antilles. Here were Afro-French and Afro-English pidgins in Trinidad and Tobago. Afro-English pidgins developed in Barbados, Antigua, Guyana, Jamaica, and South Carolina.[28]

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[27] Joyner., 203.
[28] Joyner, 204-05.

The adoption of many of these newly formed languages became Creoles to future generations. When the first generation of African-born slaves arrived in South Carolina, they came mostly from the Caribbean where an Afro-English language had probably been taught, meaning that their adoption of Gullah remained a pidgin, a second, perhaps a third language.[29] Likewise, Sterling Stuckey adds that many African ethnic groups arrived in America with a pidgin language. He quotes Edward Warren who heard "Guinea Negroes" speak:

> These antiquated darkeys spoke a sort of gibberish, which was a medley of their original dialect and the English language, and to me was perfectly unintelligible. They retained all of their original fetich superstitions and were as uncivilized, even in their old age, as when they roamed in youthful freedom among the jungles of the dark continent.[30]

However, Africans who arrived later during the eighteenth century came directly from Africa, did not go through the seasoning process, but onboard the slave ships and in the barracoons while awaiting deportation began creating a pidgin that reached the Gullah plantations. To the first American-born descendants of plantation slaves, the language would have been Creole, a native tongue.

The influence of Gullah language upon the Europeans is recognized clearly by visitors and commoners. Benjamin Allston, Jr., of Turkey Hill, the father of Martha Allston Pyatt, a family from England who settled along the Waccamaw River and who owned slave plantations is observed as having spoken Gullah and English.

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[29] Ibid.

[30] Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture*: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 70; Edward Warren, *A Doctor's Experiences on Three Continents* (Baltimore: Cushings and Bailey, 1885), 200.

It is said of Benjamin that, "his language was like a Negro's, not only in pronunciation, but even in tone."[31] Likewise, a northern correspondent wrote of the European children and said, "the children of the planters, brought up on the plantations, and allowed to run in the woods with the little Negroes, acquired the same dialect; and today many a gentleman's sons regrets that it is apparent in his speech."[32] Joyner even suggests what might be obvious that children nursed by Gullah-speaking nannies could have been native speaking Gullahs and learned English only as a second language.

Moreover, in Jamaica, Lady Nugent complained, "the Creole language is not confined to the Negroes. Many of the ladies who have not been educated in England, speak a sort of Broken English, with an indolent drawling out of their words, that is tiresome if not disgusting."[33] As Gullah migrants branched out to various parts of the world taking along with them their African names such as *Toosdy*, indicating the third day of the week, their language certainly spread along with them and influenced relationships. In the film "The Language You Cry In (1999)," a South Carolina African-American family was united with their Mende family in Sierre Leone after a childhood song reconnected them. It was mentioned in the film that, one would know where a person is from by their funeral song, meaning the language used at burial ceremonies locates relatives worldwide. [34]

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[31] Joyner, 204-05.
[32] Ibid., 208.
[33] Joyner, 206-209, 324, Note 26. Henry Preston Vaughan Nunn, *Lady Nugent's Journal of Her Residence in Jamaica from 1801 to 1805,* ed. P. Wright (Kingston: Institute of Jamaica, 1966), 98.
[34] Alvaro Toepke and Angel Serrano, *The Language You Cry In* (California Newsreel, 1998) 00:53, Robert Woodruff Library, Atlanta University, Atlanta, GA.

A recent work by Joseph A. Opala, "The Gullah: Rice, Slavery, and the Sierra Leone-American Connection" has traced Gullah directly to Bance Island, present day Bunce, located near the Sierra Leone River near Freetown. Opala was able to trace the history of a Gullah connection with the establishment of the trading fort by the African Royal Company of England about 1672. Although its trading endeavor did not survive, the undertaking by the "London firm of Alexander Grant, John Sargent, II, and Richard Oswald's team in 1742," was successful after rebuilding and adding ships that caroused the Rice Coast looking for prisoners.[35] This group of British men were joint owners of the African slavetrading factory, whose main focus was to supply slaves for South Carolina after failing in other trade.[36] Oswald of London sent several shipments of slaves, and his agents sent 250 to 360 slaves from Bance Island with other supplies.[37] A political partnership was established around 1756 lasting until the 1760s between Oswald and Henry Laurens (1724-1792), a wealthy rice planter of colonial South Carolina. Laurens then purchased Carolina rice with his earnings and sent it to Oswald in London. Laurens became one of the most prominent and wealthy slavers for colonial South Carolina slave imports.

During the 1780's, Danish merchants were purchasing 2,000 slaves from Bance Island, Sierra Leone, and Charles Town newspapers were advertising their arrival from the "Windward Coast."[38]

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[35] Ibid., Opala.
[36] David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735-1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 40.
[37] Ibid., Opala.
[38] Ibid., Opala.

Lauren's was one of four American Peace Commissioners who negotiated the United States Independence under the treaty of Paris, thanks to his alliance with Oswald.[39]

Influences of Gullah Art and Oral Traditions

African customs of art and oral traditions are very rich along the Sea Islands of Georgia and South Carolina. The Gullah have preserved this heritage from the time of slavery, beyond the American Civil War, the Black Codes, the Civil Rights Movement, and even until presently. Old practices and beliefs were a part of governing rules or belief systems brought from Africa that regulated moral and ethical values, survival and spirituality laws. Storytelling, basket weaving (sewing), pottery, mortars and pestles, carved figurines, walking sticks, and beautiful quilted blankets can be found along the roadsides and at market places that are similar to Sierra Leone's and other West African locations.

Gullah art, like Dogon art, is created primarily for religious purposes.[40] The drums are very important because they were used during rebellions to gather the community, and were eventually outlawed. The drums were feared greatly by the Europeans because many believed the drums *talked* to the Africans. During the Stono Rebellion in 1739, the calling of the warriors was with the drums. Gullah artist, Jonathan Green is one of the most well respected local artist for depicting Gullah culture and life. His love for Gullah dates back to his childhood upbringings on the Islands. Oral myths and legends Green was probably familiar with include animal tales such as The Flying

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[39] Ibid.

[40] Melville Herskovits, F. S. Herskovits, *Rebel Destiny: Among the Bush Negroes of Dutch Guiana* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1934). Kate Ezra, *Art of the Dogon: Selections from the Lester Wunderman Collection*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, (February 1998), 18.

Africans and The King Buzzard, the oldest tales on the Islands. Animal tricksters such as Brer Rabbit and Anansi the Spider are frequently recited at grave ceremonies. Dances such as the Buzzard Lope was performed to the song "Throw Me Anywhere, Lord" and the "Ring Dance" now called the "Ring Shout," are performed regularly in local churches by the McIntosh County Shouters and are very similar to the Shouters of Trinidad.[41]

The Circle Dance and Shout

The ring shout is one of the most importance practices amongst Gullahs because it connects the living with the dead, especially at funerals. The ring shout is believed along the Sea Islands to be an imitation of the buzzard's movement aimed at invoking its spirit. This buzzard's movement or circularity symbolizes the "Return Home" to Africa. Its movement is in a counter-clockwise circle. The ring shout has influenced and reshaped Christianity in the Americas and has always included music and dance. Sterling Stuckey in *Slave Culture* calls this movement the circle.[42] Stuckey points out that the circle followed the majority of Africans brought to North America from central and western areas of Africa---from Congo-Angola, Nigeria, Dahomey, Togo, the Gold Coast, and Sierra Leone, the circle was the movement in a ring during ceremonies honoring the ancestors.

The circle movement was used especially for religious purposes during slavery and that served as a model for black religion and art. Missionaries of all nationalities despised the circle so much that it became the "chief symbol of heathenism," and the

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[41] Herskovits, *Rebel Destiny;* Ezra; Robert F. Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art & Philosophy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 111.
[42] Ibid., Thompson; Stuckey, *Slavery and the Circle of Culture* in *Slave Culture*, 3, 10, 11-97.

fiddle was soon banned also. The circle at burial ceremonies held a special place among the Ibos in eastern Nigeria during the slave trade, as Stuckey declares:

> All Ibo [sic] place great faith in the due and proper observance of the funeral ceremony, for they are of the opinion that it enable the soul to go to God, and to its final destination, and without the sacred rite the soul is prevented by other spirits from eating, or in any way associating with them, and in this manner, from entering in the Creator's presence. So in this way it becomes an outcast and a wanderer on the face of the earth.[43]

Burial Ceremonies is a social event. It is given high regards to ensure that the deceased has proper burial and proper grave markings. This West African tradition was seen on southern plantations. Amusement at Gullah burial ceremonies was common as people danced, sang, prayed, and told stories to amuse the dead. The beating of a drum informed residents that a member has crossed over to be with the ancestors. All mirrors in the home were covered or turned to face the wall. Neither the living nor the dead was allowed in a graveyard without permission from the ancestors. The ritual of "breaking the chain" so that the sprits did not return for another family member was performed by breaking glass objects over the grave. The grave was then decorated with seashells and other artifacts of importance to the deceased. Food was left out for the deceased and the *saraka* meal was prepared for the family.

Additionally, the Herskovits' noticed a similarity among the Bush Negroes of Dutch Guiana that when a dead body lies in state before the funeral, stories such as the spider Anansi, the trickster, are told all night to amuse the spirit and various traditional games were played.[44] The Herskovits' also described the funeral of a man named

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[43] Stuckey, 5; Arthur G. Leonard, *The Lower Niger and Its Tribes* (New York: Macmillan, 1906), 142.
[44] Herskovits, *Rebel Destiny*, 4.

Gankwe where the attendees danced and received direction from the spirit to dig the grave and bury the dead. It is believed that "on the sacred apinti drum we speak to the spirit; we tell it we go to dig the grave."[45] The Gullah as well as other African ethnic groups have great respect for the crocodiles, the sheath-fish, and water serpents that are manifested as spirits like the buzzard.[46]

Critical among the Gullah, Mende, Igbo, and other African groups is the ability to achieve union with God, which is a form of worship, and continual access to the ancestors. In funeral ceremonies, the circular movement also represents unity. When that unity is broken, tales are told such as "The King Buzzard," where an African king was excommunicated from his village to wander the face of the earth because he sold his native people away from their land. The severity of this punishment of separation from family and community is equated to a king not having proper burial rights or a person not transmigrating into the afterlife as a good being. The afterlife held as much importance as one's current life.

In Bakango burial ceremonies, Robert F. Thompson in *Flash of the Spirit* states that bodies were laid out in state in an open yard "on a textile-decorated bier as bare-chested mourners danced to the rhythms of drums in a broken counter-clockwise circle."[47]

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[45] Ibid., 4.
[46] Dennis L. Thompson, and W.E.A van Beek, *Coping with Evil in Two African Societies* in *Religion In Africa:Experience & Expression.* Edited by Thomas D. Blakely (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1994), 213.
[47] Stuckey, p 17, note 37, page 362.

While the imprints of their feet and dragging clothes on the ground dug a deep circle, using the Southern sun as their guide, the mourners circled the body of the deceased.[48]

Likewise, Marshall Stern recounts a ring shout in South Carolina during the 1950s that varies a bit by including spirit possession:

> The dancers form a circle in the center of the floor, one in back of another. Then they begin to shuffle in a counter-clockwise direction around and around, arms out and shoulders hunched. A fantastic rhythm is built up by the rest of the group standing back to the walls, who clap their hands and stomp on the floor. Suddenly sisters and brothers scream and spin, possessed by religious hysteria, like corn starting to pop over a hot fire... This is actually a West African circle dance... a complicated and sacred ritual...[49]

Thompson notes that throughout the Diaspora people such as the Kongo-Cuban priests, the Trinidad Shouters, and on the island of St. Vincent, Rio de Janeiro, and in the United States, the circle and its counter-clockwise direction is similar to that of the Kongo tribe. Thompson and J. Cornet add to the discussion by describing the circle, "Coded as a cross, a quartered circle or diamond, a seashell's spiral, or a special cross with solar emblems at each ending--- the sign of the four moments of the sun is the Kongo emblem of spiritual continuity and renaissance..."[50]

In certain rituals amidst the Kongo-Cuban priests' and their usage of the *Zarabanda* charm, others such as the Trinidad Shouters usage of Afro-Christian crosses, and the Shaker "mourning" ritual of St. Vincent follow their rituals.[51]

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[48] Ibid., Thompson, *Flash, 108-11.* Ibid., Stuckey.
[49] Marshall Stearns, *The Story of Jazz,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 18.
[50] Robert F. Thompson, and J. Cornet, *Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds,* National Gallery of Art, (Washington: The University of Michigan, 1981), 28, 54, 151.
[51] Ibid., Thompson and Cornet, *Four Moments of the Sun.*

Robert Thompson notes that "the circle is written on the earth, and a person stands upon it to take an oath, or to signify that he or she understands the meaning of life as a process shared with the dead below the river or the sea--- the real sources of earthly power and prestige."[52] A Kongo ancestral ritual that is profoundly related to counterclockwise dance occurs, according to Thompson, when an individual place a cross in a circle to derive the four moments of the sun and that it serves as purposes of marital rites and societal initiations and mediations. Thompson asserts, "In each rendering the right hand sphere or corner stands for dawn which, in turn, is the sign of life beginning. Noon, the uppermost disk or corner, indicates the flourishing of life, the point of most ascendant power. Next, by the inevitable organic process as we know it, come change and flux, the setting of the sun, and death, marked by the left-hand median point or disk."[53]

The *Kalunga* line, the horizontal line of the cross is according to the Congo, with those who lived long and were generous, wise and strong "on a heroic scale," they "die twice" once 'here,' and once 'there,' beneath the watery barrier, the line Bakongo called *Kalunga*.[54] "This is a line marked by the river, the sea, or even dense forestation, a line which divides this world from the next."[55]

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[52] Thompson, *Flash*, 110-11.
[53] Stuckey, 13, 110; Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit,* 108-09.
[54] Ibid. Thompson.
[55] Ibid.

Stuckey adds that "[w]hen that line which extends from dawn to sunset, is evoked by the Kongo staffcross, it symbolizes the surface of a body of water beneath which the world of the ancestors is found, and this casts additional light on why water immersion has had such a hold on blacks in America and why counterclockwise dance is often associated with such water rites."[56]

The circle dance and shout, according to Lydia Parrish held similarities in Dahomey and North America. She witnessed the same solo ring shouts in Virginia and North Carolina that was a combination of the ring shouts being performed "in" the ring dance in both group and solo forms in Dahomey.[57] These features, almost precise in form, were found within the *priestly functions of secret societies* among the Suriname Bush, which are centuries removed from their ancestral home in the Gold Coast.[58] The dance amongst the Suriname was similar to the ancestral ring dance in North America: the feet executed "figures in place without leaving the ground, the arms hanging loosely at the side," and "the arms flexed and held rigid at the elbow and knees bent but rigid" and "the movement of the feet, angular and precise, was reiterated by the outstretched palms which all the muscles of the hips took up the rhythm."[59] The circle dance, shout, and songs continue to be practiced amongst the Gullah during Sunday worship, community events, rituals and practices along the Coastal Sea Islands and abroad.

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[56] Stuckey, *Slave Culture,* 13.
[57] Lydia Parrish, *Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands* (New York: Creative Age Press, 1942), 54; Stuckey, 12.
[58] Herskovits, *Rebel,* v.; Stuckey, 16.
[59] Herskovits, 18-19; Stuckey, footnote 35, pp. 17, 362.

Parrish comments on slave songs she witnessed by saying:

> The slave songs or "ant'ems," as they were sometimes called in Georgia before the Civil War and are called in the Bahamas to this day, may have resulted from a spark of divine fire; and the blacks, like so much tinder, may have carried them far and wide through the agency of the slave markets or the removal of the planters from one site to another and that in other words, the tunes may represent a gradual development over a period of a hundred and fifty years, rather than a full-blown inspiration.[60]

Likewise, Zora Neale Hurston in *The Sanctificed Church*, says that "shouting is a community thing."[61] It strives in concert and undoubtedly is a survival of the African "possession" by the gods.[62] The song "knee-bone I call You, Knee-bone Bend," sounds very similar to a popular African American nineteenth century song H. A. Sieber recalls, "Ebo I call you."[63] Alan Lomax in *Georgia Sea Island Songs* recorded the lyrics: Kneebone, didn't I call you, Ah-ah kneebone, Kneebone, didn't I call you, O Lord, kneebone bend. I call you in the mornin', Ah, kneebone, Call you in the evenin', O Lord, kneebone bend.[64] Though Sieber lived on the Sea Islands from 1987 – 1989, it is unclear if secrecy played a role in the title of the song varying from that of Alan's rural South field songs that aimed to retain more "authenticity."

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[60] Parrish, *Slave Songs,* 5.
[61] Zora Neale Hurston, The Sanctified Church (Berkely: Turtle Island Foundation, 1981), 91.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid., Sieber.
[64] Parrish, 6.

CHAPTER 4

FLIGHT: JOURNEY AND THE FLYING AFRICANS

The purpose of this research was to investigate the term flight as both motif and as consciousness in the legend of the flying Africans as demonstrated in the four selected texts: Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*, Toni Morrisons's *Song of Solomon*, Ralph Ellison's *Flying Home*, and Octavia Butler's *Kindred.* Direct descendants of the flying Africans, the Gullah people, have influenced literary genre in ways directly related to one's consciousness and memory by using symbolism.

The findings address four questions: 1) Where is home in relationship to flight and its relationship to epic memory? 2) What is the concept of the origination of flight as utilized by the Igbos? 3) In what ways is flight transferable as reflected in the four selected texts? 4) What factors identified in flight and epic memory are reflective in the lived experiences and culture of the Gullah as revealed in the four selected texts.

Flight in the Selected Texts

Several recurring patterns of flight are revealed in the texts; they are: duality, death, circle songs and dances, and consciousness. Duality for this research is a reflection of doubleness and is seen in the *Chi* and the soul. The selected texts reveal that duality runs throughout in the form of names, relationships, objects, and animals. Couples marry; two men fly as well as two objects such as planes and kites; birds roam the air reflecting

hidden meaning as in the name Miss Bird in *Song of Solomon* and biblical names such as Pilate and Magdalene. Next, death occurs as an introduction to a novel, in the middle as a natural process of life, and at the end as a pivotal point in understanding flight, both physically and metaphysically. Similar to the occurrences of death is the circle songs and dances and how they form special codes that are revealed as the storyline evolves. The songs and dances are usually performed simultaneously in the form of childrens' games or at the birth of a child as in Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. They also represent a person's name such as "Sing" and "Mr. Golla Mack" which for the latter is a word play for a child's game that is demonstrated in the lived black experience today outside the Gullah community. However, most of all, there is consciousness that heightens and runs parallel to the story's climax. Consciousness, like duality, death, and the circle songs and dances, are all recurring patterns that bring clarity and understanding, both to the protagonists and the readers in relationship to flight.

Epic Memory

There are eight components related to flight of which epic memory seems to encompass and interpret its distinguishing features: memory retrieval, the spiritual dimension of experience, imaginations, recitation, fragments, reenactments, and location.[1] According to Molefi Asante in *The Afrocentric Idea,* memory retrieval is the re-gathering of fragments of the mind forgotten or lost. Once memory is retrieved, feeling and emotions arise.

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[1] Molefi K Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985); Derek Walcot, *The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory in* The Noble Lecture (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1993).

Memory consists of imagination as it "thinks and organizes… records ideas and thoughts" and the experiences one has.[2] Recitation is what a person or community does to keep the imagination within the memory alive. The emotions one feels is the spiritual dimension of that experience that occur when fragments or pieces of memory composed of thoughts and ideas form images that cause the past and present to be rejoined.[3] Reenactments by faith are rituals or events held at specific times and places. No matter where ones physical location is, his mind holds the memory. These eight components are viewed annually at epic events in various forms amongst various cultures. Epic events differ from epic memory in that the events are the fragments of memory pieces gathered to tell a story or event. The components are not written in stone or on tablets, but they are stored deep in the recesses of African and African-American minds.

Central among the components of epic memory are fragments that represent the scattered pieces of memory. Fragments show up in the texts as symbolisms and include people, places, and things such as songs, colors, and dances. Even Avey and her husband Jerome's dance had become a stabilizing quality in their lives and sustained them until they lost focus. Names, stories or tales, boat rides and songs, planes and kites, and places like Ibo Landing and North White Plains, Morrison's chapter in her text *Sleeper's Wake*, and peoples names such as Mr. Blue, Mr. Golla Mack, Macon Dead, Pilate, Avatara, and Solomon were all symbolisms of a greater spiritual truth.[4]

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[2] Asante, 80-81.
[3] Asante, 80-81.
[4] Kites can be a toy guided by a string or an Eastern bird often discussed in African myths.

Likewise, there are also the five elements of nature: gold, earth, air, water, fire which represents in African cosmology[5] the levels from carnality, clay, to spirituality, gold.[6] Morrison mentions four of these elements of nature in *Song of Solomon*: earth, water, gold, and air as ways to fulfill a life's purpose. Marshall and Ellison name the five elements of nature in different ways such as mentioning the flying Africans and their walking on water and the Airman Todd in reference to air and earth when he is grounded or his plane crashes into the earth, and undoubtedly with some form of smoke or at least fire.

Also, between the living dead, (Avey, Milkman, Dana, and Todd) and deceased, (Aunt Cuney, Sing, Solomon, Rufus, and the Igbos) there is no distinction.[7] This explains why Aunt Cuney speaks to Avey, fights with her, and has no marks of the grave. Even her ethos or feelings of deja vu is felt after Avey awakens. These tenets and others lead to flight whenever memory is retrieved, and shows the end of the five elements of nature.

Memory retrieval is a constant and continual process throughout an individuals life and requires a clear mind. Asante in *The Afrocentric Idea* believes that memory retrieved delivers the "pathos, feeling, and dramatic experience without telling the literal story."[8] An example would be annual events such as the Geechee Kunda and the Gullah Festival performed annually in Georgia and South Carolina during the fall and spring, crowded with onlookers who may enjoy the event but never fully understand the literal

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[5] Joseph A. Baldwin, *Notes on an Africentric Theory of Black Personality*, in *Western Journal of Black Studies*, volume 5 no. 3 (Fall 1981), 172-79.
[6] Ra Un Nefer Amen, *Metu Nefer Vol. 2 Anuk Ausar: The Kamitic Initiation System*, (New York: Khamit Media Trans Visions, Inc, 1994), 188-95.
[7] Clenora Hudson-Weems, Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow:* Authentic Existence in *African Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves* (Troy: Bedford Publishing, 1993), 107.
[8] Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea,* 80.

story. They are given only fragments of a spiritual dimension of experience which are recalled by imaginations and recitations of stories that make the participants want to perform in honor of their heritage and ancestors on a continual basis.

Usually, epic memory is performed in a location that holds significant memory of the ancestors so that due homage is given. Memorial locations in the texts are: "The Landing," "The Big Drum," "The Cave" in Shalimar, Virginia, Not Mercy Hospital, and the location of Todd's plane crash. The emotions and ecstatic energy that flow during the epic signify the presence of the ancestors by spirit possession. The imagination plays a key role in the epic event because the organized thought processes and records of ideas cause each to recite and commemorate. Asante adds, "It is the image within the structure of the thought that proves the ethos."[9] Avey, Milkman, Dana, and Todd, were all people in cities, states, and eras apart, but the fragments in their minds combined so that images formed and healing and self-discovery were made possible. Fragments are also strength mechanisms for survival that are pieced together at specific times. Memory retrieval begins at birth and continues until death when the soul leaves the body and continues on its journey but in essence never dying.

Furthermore, Asante and other scholars believe that when restoration or self-discovery occurs there is a returning and a remaining, hence, history is not forgotten but is stasis both in the mind and in physical location. All of the texts show that the protagonists returned and remained by teaching others acceptance and strategies of fighting for their rights. Yet, in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*, Dana's returning and remaining were reversed; in order to survive, she had to keep returning home in 1976

[9] Asante, 80.

because her ancestor of 1769 had to be born, and she was the savior-like figure who came to assist and experience the journey.

Finally, the epics memories that are recalled are often rebuilt one at a time within the new culture that encompasses the community. In *Praisesong, Song of Solomon, Kindred, and Flying Home,* the songs, dances, places visited, and tales told were a part of the rebuilding process each had to endure to complete the journey. These epics memories were placed in the mind during childhood rearing such as in *Praisesong* and *Flying Home* when Avey was seven and Todd was four, young adulthood such as in *Song of Solomon* when Milkman was a teenager, or in old age and stored for later usage as in Avey's situation when she was sixty-five. Once the mind is free and peaceful, the fractures are reconstructed in the mind by combining varying forms of nouns, words, new metaphors, and languages critical to culture survival; tools previously used to strip man of his true identity when he was not allowed to think. In each of the texts, the protagonists experiences a crisis that separated them from family and normal activities in order that the mind could be free to think clearly. The epic fragments now accessed begin to form the new culture that had been building most of their lives. This new culture is a combination of past and current fragments now rejoined together.

Flight as the journey, is circular and consists of five stages that continue over an individuals lifetime.[10] They are: the struggle, the call, the Griot, the awakening, and wholeness. The circle is by far one of the most clearly defined retentions that explain how flight grows out of the legend of the Flying Africans. The circle is not only critical in literary flight texts but it represents the *return.* The return is performed by reenacting

[10] These stages are a result of flight as discussed in all four texts.

circle songs and dances known today amongst the Gullah as the "ring shout" a dance similar to the "Buzzard Lope" and is believed to be an imitation of the buzzard's counter-clockwise circular movement aimed at invoking its spirit. This movement or *circularity* symbolizes the "Return Home" to Africa and has influenced and reshaped Christianity in the Americas along with its music and dance. Prominent figures such as Dr. Buzzard and the King Buzzard, conjurors and medicine men are the oldest tale on the Islands. The Buzzard Lope or ring plays are seen in Trinidad, St. Vincent, West Africa, Belize, North Carolina and Virginia.

Sterling Stuckey believes that the circle followed the majority of Africans brought to North America from central and western areas of Africa--- from Congo-Angola, Nigeria, Dahomey, Togo, the Gold Coast, and Sierra Leone, paying homage to the ancestors.[11] The "shout" is performed widely in churches and epic events within the Gullah culture.

The spiritual essence of flight as motif and as a form of consciousness necessitates a new dialogue into how best to effectively gain entry into the Gullah community. This dialogue hopefully will bring clarity in understanding the Gullahs suspicions of outsiders. When flight is understood from a spiritual lived experience and not an intellectual experience it becomes evident that this repeated act of rebellion gives the Gullah spiritual power to reconnect with ancestors who are always present to lead them home or to transmigrate another soul into the next world. An example of returning home and reconnecting with the ancestors is demonstrated in the film *Sankofa*, when Mona (renamed Shola) as a house servant and sex slave returns home with a level of

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[11] Sterling Stuckey, *Slavery and the Circle of Culture* in *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 3-10, 11-97.

African consciousness and thus away from European assimilation. She re-appears in Africa among her deceased ancestors, Nunu, the African griot in the novel, after experiencing Cape Coast Castle in Ghana and slave plantation life and abuse.

Religion, Spirituality and Secrecy

Gullah religion is an important aspect of life. The Spirit holds a very special place in their aesthetic. Religion is a blending of Christianity, Islam, and West African worship. One of the most famous known believer was Bilali, a Muslim who was the head driver for a plantation owner on Cannon's Point, St. Simon's Island.[12]

The Methodists and Baptists influenced religions during the late 1700s and early 1800s by focusing mostly on equality and illiteracy. White and black preachers and teachers rose up to fight for the abolishment of slavery and the right to worship the god of choice, mostly the Christian god and its soul-saving belief, which often excluded Africans during slavery because they were thought to *not* have a soul. The overall Christian belief was that slavery was a sin. The Gullahs frequently compared themselves to the Old Testament Israelites who were in bondage under a cruel system of dehumanization. Slaves at times had to steal away at night to be baptized, and mostly could not worship openly. Their worship places were brushy arbors, praise houses, shacks, and fields. The house slaves would be allowed to sit in the church loft if it was available, but away from the white worshipers.

A central Christian belief was the duality of the soul and spirit. After the soul left the body, the spirit would journey with the ancestors, often times reincarnating into

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[12] Georgia Historical Society, "Islam and the Gullah/Geechee Community," accessed October 23, 2012, http://www.georgiahistory.com/containers/855.

animal spirits. A crucial belief among the Dogon tribe of West Africa is that "everything in existence comes in balanced pairs or twins (dualism)."[13] When the Flying Africans (Igbos) rebelled at Dunbar Creek, they invoked the protection of their supreme Great *Chi* or God Chi-ukwu/*Chukwu,* then collectively marched into the water while still chained together, surrendered their souls to the water Spirit that brought them across the waters, and sang the customary hymn from their native Ibgoland. "The Water Spirit brought. The Water Spirit will take us home. *Orimiri Omambala bu anyi bia. Orimiri Omambala Ka nyi ga ejina.*"[14] This song too, reveals a duality of spirit.

Likewise, in Igbo culture, everything is interconnected and has a double. The *chi*/spirit plays a central role in the life of the Igbo because it is always present in the metaphysical and shares in all experiences. Jude Akpala confirms this when he states "Wherever something stands, something else will stand beside it"[15] meaning everything has a counterpart. Igboland ethnic groups of West Central Africa believes that the *Chi,* the "protecting spirit," or guardian spirit leaves anyone who is removed from the family. The *Chi* is often believed to be the ancestral spirit of one's father or grandfather. To regain freedom after being seized is critical because it indicates that the *Chi* was unable to protect and if freedom is not regained everything in this life and reincarnation into the next could be lost. To safeguard that freedom, many choose suicide by drowning, or willing oneself to death "fixed melancholy", if threatened. In *Black Cargoes*, Daniel Mannix confirms this belief in the transcendent return to the homeland when he quotes

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[13] Chukwuma Azuonye, *Dogon: The Heritage Library of African Peoples of West Africa* (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 1996), 37.
[14] H. A. Sieber, "The Factual Basis of the Ebo Landing Legend."
[15] Jude C. Akpala, *Igbo Metaphisics* in Chinua Achebe's, *"Things Fall Apart,"* John Hopkins University Press*: Callaloo 24, no. 2 (Spring, 2002): 559-66.*

Captain Phillips of the *Hannibal*, "We had about 12 Negroes did willfully drown themselves, and others starv'd themselves to death; for," and "tis their belief that when they die they return home to their own country and friends again."[16] Several regions reported this belief at various times of the slave trade, but the Igbo of eastern Nigeria seemed to be the most prevalent practitioners and believers.

In 1788, surgeon Ecroide Claxton attended to a shipload of Igbos onboard a slave ship almost a hundred years after the *Hannibal's* voyage where Igbos welcomed death:

> Some of the slaves, he mentions, wished to die on an idea that they should then get back to their own country. The captain in order to obviate this idea, thought of an expedient viz, to cut off the heads of those who died intimating to them that if determined to go, they must return without heads. The slaves were accordingly brought up to witness the operation. One of them by a violent exertion got loose and flying to the place where the nettings had been unloosed in order to empty the tubs, he darted overboard. The ship brought to, a man was placed in the main chains to catch him which he perceiving, made signs which words cannot express expressive of his happiness in escaping. He then went down and was seen no more.[17]

Igbo slaves continued to fight captivity by refusing to eat, attempting suicide by self-inflicted bodily harm, and "fixed melancholy."

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[16] Daniel P. Mannix, *Black Cargoes: A History of the Atlantic Slave Trade: 1510-1865* (New York: Viking Press, 1962) 117-18.
[17] Mannix, 117-18.

George Howe, an American medical student onboard an illegal slave ship in 1859, defines melancholy as:

> Notwithstanding their apparent good health each morning three or four dead would be found, brought upon deck, taken by the arms and heels, and tossed overboard as unceremoniously as an empty bottle. Of what did they die? And [why] always at night? In the barracoons it was known that if a Negro was not amused and kept in motion, he would mope, squat down with his chin on his knees and arms clasped about his legs and in a very short time die. Among civilized races it is thought almost impossible to *hold one's breath until death follows*. It is thought the African can do so. They had no means of concealing anything and certainly did not kill each other. One of the duties of the slave-captains was when they found a slave sitting with knees up and head drooping, to start them up, run them about the deck, give them a small ration of rum, and divert them until in a normal condition.[18]

Likewise, Daniel P. Mannix and Malcom Cowley state "the Middle Passage was a crossroads and marketplace for diseases," and for no apparent reason the people had lost their will to live, and often hang themselves or jumped overboard.[19]

Another important feature of Gullah religion was the Christian symbol of the staff cross, planted in the water by the deacon, symbolic of the Four Moments of the Sun, which is similar to the Christian Bakong Cross, but without a hole through the middle.[20] In Bakong, this cross "only marginally denotes the Crucifixion of Christ, for the Christian Bakong, partly since the Bakong people do not see Christ as a scapegoat but instead as a renowned healer and mediator." In ancient Kong thought, the cross signifies "the parting of the ways."[21]

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[18] Daniel P. Mannix and Malcom Cowley, *The Middle Passage*, in *Historical Viewpoints: Notable Articles from American Heritage, Volume One to 1877*, 5th ed., ed. John A. Garraty (1970), 120.
[19] Ibid., 111.
[20] Mannix, *Black Cargoes*; Marquetta Goodwine, *Gullah Relationships to African Ancestors* in *The Legacy of Ebo Landing: Gullah Roots of African American Culture* (Atlanta: Clarity Press, 1998), 63.
[21] Dennis L Thompson and W.E.A van Beek, *Religion In Africa: Experience & Expression,* ed. Thomas D. Blakely (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1994), 240; Robert F. Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art & Philosophy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 108.

One arm represents the boundary between this world and the afterlife, while the other arm, represents the path of power between the worlds, and the hole at the juncture referring to the grave itself.[22] The Igbos form of spirituality, whether Christianity or a mixture of other religions prior to their arrival in the Americas may not be know exactly, but, one might gain insight by observing the religious practices of Christianity among the Gullahs if one can get past their secrecy hierarchy. All of the texts include an age hierarchy.

> Additionally, secrecy is deeply rooted within African life. Lydia Parrish said
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> it took me three winters on St Simon's to hear a single slave song, three times as many winters to unearth the Buzzard Lope and similar solo dances, and the game songs known as ring-play. . .[23]
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> Parrish, also recalled another visit to St. Simon's island, and said that
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> when I arrived on St. Simon's in 1912, the stillness of the Negroes was puzzling until questioning brought out the fact that the island was a summer resort, and contact with city whites and their black servants had had its numbing influence; that the old-time singing had gone out of style, and spirituals weren't sung any more.[24]

Perhaps Parrish's conclusion that the black servants stillness stemmed from their relationships with the city whites was really more of an acceptable response for the era, her later comments after working with the Herskovits' revealed that the Africans were upholding a certain level of secrecy. The Herskovits' received similar treatment from another West African tribe, the Kramanti Bush Negroes, an African secret society of men when asking about the obia, a spirit.

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[22] Thompson in *Flash of the Spirit* quotes (cf., Wyatt MacGaffey 1986:116-120ff), 108.
[23] Lydia Parrish, *Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands* (New York: Creative Age Press, 1942) 20.
[24] Ibid., 9.

The Herskovits' team was told, "Now, *do not ask* about Kromanti, white man. . . Only a Kromanti man knows about Kromanti. Do not ask, because I can not tell you."[25] These warriors 'controlled the powerful supernatural forces of preventive and healing magic,' critical to life of the Bush Negro.[26]

Minkisi, a complex system of "sacred medicines" of herbalistic healings and divination appeared in the Americans and served as avatars of Kongo and Angola lore in the New World. In the United States medicine men were known as "conjurers" and "root-persons". These men and women had similar healing and divination powers as those in West Africa. Along the Sea Islands, conjurers and root doctors such as Dr. Buzzard were well known during slavery and can be found today amongst local residents throughout various island locations. The Herskovits' recalls that a Granman on the river struck them with a "calabash and a buzzard's feather dipped with medicine on their heads, over the eyes, on the palms of their hands, and against the calves three times."[27] The Opete obia, medicine bearing the name of the sacred buzzard was given for their safety while traveling down the river. "The Opete gets the eyes when it comes to a person, just like Kromanti gets into the head, and Vodu into the belly."[28] Even the Dombi Negroes believe in the buzzard's spiritual power. Sabaku, a runaway slave says, "If we do not meet again in life, we shall meet in death." He rode the back of a buzzard named Yank'o across the river and said, "You who fly high, who fly over water, . . . carry me to safety," and "That is why we do not shoot a buzzard.

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[25] Parrish, *Slave Songs,* 9; Melville Herskovits and F. S. Herskovits, *Rebel Destiny: Among the Bush Negroes of Dutch Guiana* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1934), 308, 316.
[26] Herskovits, 288.
[27] Ibid., 266-7.
[28] Herskovits, *Rebel Destiny,* 266-67.

If we shoot him by accident, then we must say 'Many thanks."[29] The Igbo Negroes, the Dombi Negroes, and the Kromanti Bush Negroes all of West Africa believe in secrecies and the buzzard as spirits that are called upon and dreaded.

Melville Herskovits and Parrish' believe that the Africans hold a unique philosophy in secrecy. Their research indicates that southerners do not recall Africans sharing information that is not common knowledge. His conversation with a Dutch Guiana Bush Negro reveal that "Long ago our ancestors taught us that it is unwise for a man to tell anyone more than half of what he knows about anything."[30] Even among the Suriname Negroes, a common saying when something is to be concealed from the Bukras, the white man, is: "M*assa Gadu sabi* ---God knows."[31] Several scholars attest to this secrecy amongst the Africans and Gullah.

Flight as a Manifestation of Spiritual Power

The flight motif in texts began to expand in the mid 1900s and central to it was spiritual power, which operates concurrently with flight. Toni Morrison, in *Song of Solomon*, dedicates her understanding of flight to her upbringing of her personal family history including oral histories of second-generation descendants of enslaved Africans, research of slave narratives and interviews, and songs sang about John Solomon Willis from the Greenville and Alabama branch of her family.

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[29] Ibid., 17, 256.
[30] Ibid., Herskovits, Parrish, *Slave Songs,* 20; Melville J. Herskovits, *Dahomey: an Ancient West African Kingdom,* (New York: J. J. Augustin, 1938), 1:216.
[31] Herskovits, *Rebel,* 66.

Morrison recalls that

> Willis, her maternal grandfather, and his first son, Green, reminds her of a song sang by her mother and aunts that began with, "Green, the only son of Solomon," in which she introduces Jay, one of the twenty-one children, "the only son of Solomon" who was clinging on to him when he flew back to Africa. The importance of myths is forgotten if not stressed . . ." the flying myth in *Song of Solomon* "might mean the [Greek] Icarus to some readers," but its specific meaning to her is "about black people who could fly."[32]

Folklore in her life always included this gift of flying, even if humor is found in this idea because of lack of understanding, but interviews of first hand accounts are everywhere, "even in the spirituals and gospels." Its meaning of "escape or death" is left up to the reader to decide, however, Morrison attempts to find out.[33] In Morrison's text, she opens the novel with flight as Mr. Robert Smith leaps at three o'clock from atop No Mercy Hospital headed to Lake Superior, a spiritual significance of the trinity, or Mr. Smith's birth, death, and rebirth, with blue silk wings attached to his body. An overwhelmed pregnant mother, Ruth Dead, witnesses this incident and soon delivers Milkman, the protagonist. A central African belief is that while one is exiting life by death, another is entering life by being born. Pilate, Milkman's aunt, sings a child's circle song about flying Africans as she stands away from the crowd and witnesses Mr. Smith jump from the roof.

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[32] Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (New York: Vintage, 2004).
[33] Toni Morrison, interview by Thomas Leclair, March 21, 1981, The Language Must Not Sweat, http://www.newrepublic.com/article/books-and-arts/magazine/95923/the-language-must-not-sweat.

Pilate sings:

O Sugarman done fly away
Sugarman done gone
Sugarman cut cross the sky
Sugarman gone home . . .[34]

Guitar, the "cat-eyed boy about five or six" was sent around back of the hospital to fetch the security guard. Guitar was a boy who was new to the North and the sense of freedom that came with it verses the South where blacks could not look whites eye-to-eye or speak unless spoken to. His presence like the others, place all of the main characters in the same physical location at the beginning of the novel, at No Mercy Hospital witnessing Mr. Smith, the insurance man, fly home, though only Mr. Smith and Guitar are named while the others are known by their experiences.

Flight as a Manifestation of Self-Awareness

In Joyce Pettit's work, *Towards Wholeness in Paule Marshall's Fiction,* emphasizes the need for an awakened consciousness in *Praisesong for the Widow* that includes spiritual regeneration necessary for wholeness.[35] For clarity in this research, self-awareness and consciousness are used interchangeably. Several texts suggests that the flight motif includes a journey of freedom from social dualism which is necessary because of the separation and forgetfulness of cultures with pressures that cause fractured psyches or memories. Thus, the journey of reconciliation allows the protagonist to confront issues from the past that have caused a wedge between self and community. This process of journeying as seen in the protagonist Avey "Avatara"

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[34] Morrison, *Song of Solomon,* 3-6.
[35] Joyce Pettis, *The Journey Completed: Spiritual Regeneration in Praisesong for the Widow* in Towards Wholeness in Paule Marshall's Fiction (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1995), 106-35.

Williams, demonstrates the struggle individuals must go through in order to gain self-awareness and achieve wholeness.

While on an annual cruise in the Caribbean with two friends Avey abandons the ship and is forced to reconnect with her heritage: first, in a ritual for self-awareness, second, recognition of the ancestors, and third, reconciliation with her past in the South where it all began, thus, completing the circle. Avey, like others in the texts were linked by physical and mental spaces on their journey towards self-awareness that forced them to recognize a new reality, their reality in a dual society and their true reason for the internal struggle. Pettis believe that movement is critical in Marshall's usage of the journey motif because it allows space outside of the fracturing environment that causes debilitation. This movement allows the protagonist to be mobile within and without the crippling localities so that the spiritual journey towards wholeness begins.

Comparatively, Pettis shows the demographic range Marshall depicts in her fiction that began during the slave trade of the displaced West Africans and the affects of fracturing that span the Diaspora. She also links Marshall's journeying novels with that of Julie Dash's, *Daughters of the Dust,* where the author situates Amelia in a similar geographic and mental struggle whereby her reconciliation is for herself, her mother, Myown, and future generations.[36] Myown's journey from Dawtah's Island in the South to the North is the reverse of Amelia's journey; Morrison does the same with Milkman's journey in comparison to his ancestors' journey in Virginia. Amelia's return home to a peasant culture she hoped to forget from childhood reconnects Myown's internal longing with a culture that remained through memory. Amelia's reclaiming of

[36] Julie Dash, *Daughters of the Dust* (New York: Penguin Group, 1999).

her heritage brought Myown home mentally, physically, and to the wholeness leading to reclaim her personhood. This journey depicts the duality of being in spatial confinements throughout these texts whereby various cultures intertwine. The texts also demonstrate the power of preservation, restoration, and the desire necessary before conscious realization. It is this desire to return home coupled with knowledge of inevitable death, which are both physical and mental as demonstrated by the characters in the texts.

Likewise, in Butler's *Kindred,* Dana's entire journey consists of spatial confinements and trials necessary before returning home. Dana, an African-American woman is recently married to Kevin, a Caucasian man living in California in 1976. They are both published writers. On Dana's twenty-sixth birthday, the fourth of July, a dizzy spell lands her metaphysically on the Weylin plantation in southern Maryland in 1819. Dana is forced into protecting Rufus via timetravel between her home in California and his home in Maryland. Rufus is the Weylin's son and would be father of Hagar, the unborn child Dana is there to protect. Rufus as a child played with Hagar's mother, Alice, but now that he is a young man and has uncontrollable desires for Alice, Rufus is torn between the power given him because of slavery and a woman he loves but is unable to control fully. The novel *Kindred* is about family and survival techniques in the midst of systems of sexism, racism, gender, and social constructs.

Flight as a Manifestation of Self-Identity

Todd, a Tuskegee Airman in Ralph Ellison's *Flying Home* is struggling with being a Black Airman in racist Alabama during World War II. He is stuck in training

flights of which he never seems to get out of because of classism so that he could enjoy the benefits of a true Airman. He struggles with acceptance from his white officers and the ignorance of the black field hands in his area, thus he has separated himself from the African "peasants." Jefferson, a black field hand helps Todd realize his "double-consciousness" after his plane crash in the field of racist Dabney Graves because of an impact with a buzzard. Once grounded, Jefferson saves his life by not only talking him through why he crashed, reciting epic stories about flying to high, and staying with him until help arrives from his unit. Todd has lost both his identity and his community, and in his bitterness a wedge emerges that separates his perception of life and what he hopes it to be.

Hence, Clenora Hudson-Weems in *Africana Womanism* adds credence to this research by emphasizing the importance of self-naming and self-definition in her analysis of *Praisesong for the Widow*.[37] Naming in flight novels such as the aforementioned are often the same but with varying spelling. Naming in the motif is traced back to the first occurrences described in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the South. The elder men such as Toby, Joseph, Daddy Grace, and Jefferson the sharecropper who assisted Todd after his plane crash, Uncle Mundy, and High John de Conqueror held various duties within the community where they taught and expressed self-identity.

Additionally, powerful women were within the community who served as nurturers and teachers. They had names such as Hagar both in Morrison's and Butler's text, Pilate, Mother, Elizabeth, Aunt Cuney or Myown. MyOwn, whose name indicate

[37] Hudson-Weems, 105-17.

possession or ownership of things she holds dear, her memory of home, her daughter Amelia's life because she is unable to accept her own dysfunctional life of bad health and a deteriorating marriage. Yet, she chose towards the end as her final glimmer of hope was failing to take her daughters advice and move back home and was reborn. Her choices and actions are not for her daughter's life, but for herself. Myown resembles "Our Own," words Avey's husband Jerome spoke to her when expressing the life he wanted to live. Also, names like First Corinthians, Mary Magdalen(e), Sing and Song, and *Pharo* Harris are all biblical names spoken of in Morrison's or Marshall's works. These names held power and some form of them were often found in religious writings or African literary flight texts. Pettis also affirms that Marshall as well as others scholars claims West Africa as the central location for cultural identity.

In African cosmology, *nommo,* the word, is the life force, the giver of all things including the name. Janheinz Jahn in *MUNTU*, believes that in order for a newborn child to become a man, woman, or personality, it must first be given a name or the name must be pronounced by the father or a 'sorcerer', until then it is a *kintu,* a thing. It is through the power of the word, nommo, the correct naming of a thing, that it comes into existence. Without the word, there would be no magic and all forces would be at a standstill.[38] A contrast between the flight texts reveals that Morrison names her protagonist Milkman because he nursed from his mother's breast until seven years old and his flying ancestor Solomon was so named because he reminded her of a relative with one son, named Jay; Marshall names her protagonist Avey, short for Avatara, the

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[38] Janheinz Jahn, *Nommo* in *MUNTU: African Culture and the Western World* (New York: Grove Press, 1990), 121-33.

reincarnate being manifested in the world; Elizabeth's grandmother names her before she is born knowing that she will be the *seer* in the family, an ability to see into the past and present and thus the name Avey "Avatara". After each protagonist realizes his/her own identity, she/he was able to lead others into theirs.

However, Morrison utilizes naming colors and songs in her narratives. Naming also includes colors and songs that held importance and secret meaning in keeping the flight motif true to the legend. Mr. Blue often indicates hardship and sorrow. The colors blue, white, lime gelatin, gold, and red were seen in Ruth Dead's rose petals her two daughters scrambled to pick up after she dropped them. Similarly, Mr. Smith's blue silk wings, the blues songs Jay, Avey's husband, listened to, Avey's gold pin that caught the baby's attention and her Gullah gold behind as her husband called it, Macon Dead's gardener, Freddie, and his "flash-of-gold smile," and the colored cemetery. A unique exception for a man's name and how he was identified is Guitar in *Song of Solomon*, which indicates an association with music and the Griot. However, the name was linked to a secret society called Seven Days that was similar to an underground movement by black men in the rural South, except that these men killed whites for black killings. The names and lyrics of songs sang during the ring shout at church and at funerals had special meanings woven into stories. The messages were hidden within the lyrics of the songs. Lyrics had similar word spellings as evidenced in earlier periods such as in a funeral song sang to a dying woman after childbirth in *Daughters of the Dust.* The community gathered around the bedside of Ayodele and in the road outside the cabin, singing and waiting on Ayodele to cross over after childbirth.

They sang:

A waka mu wone, kambe ya le,
a le e tombe I siha, ye kangaa
Come to the house in the evening.
For she will soon be gone on her journey.[39]

Milkman heard children sing upon his first visit to Shalimar, Virginia in *Song:*

Jay the only son of Solomon
Come booba yalle, come booba tambee
Whirl about and touch the sun
Come booba yalle, come booba tambee. . .[40]

The words "kambe ya le," "yalle tambee," and "KumKum kunda yali, kum...tabre!" although spelled differently are in essence the same words meaning "Come Fly Away!" as defined in Hamilton's work.[41]

Cornelia Bailey and Christena Bledsoe add to the discussion by naming their book, *God, Dr. Buzzard, and the Bolito Man.*[42] This book is of particular interest because Bailey is a Saltwater Geechee whose family has lived on the island since 1803, the same year the Igbos rebelled and their story, the Flying Africans was recorded. From a recorded lived experience on Sapelo Island, great details are given about the importance of how God (Spirit), Dr. Buzzard (the conjuror), and the Bolito Man (the numbers man) played central co-joining roles in African American culture along the Sea Islands. The respect and reverence for these three are central to survival.

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[39] Dash, *Daughters of the Dust,* 91.
[40] Morrison, *Song of Solomon,* 264.
[41] Virginia Hamilton, *The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 166-73.
[42] Cornelia Bailey and Christena Bledsoe, *God, Dr. Buzzard, and the Bolito Man* (New York: Doubleday, 2000).

Bailey in her text remembers hearing the minister say while sitting in church, "and as for me and my family, we shall praise the Lord," and she remarked and got chuckles, "and Dr. Buzzard and the Bolito Man."[43] As can be seen throughout the flight motif's history, neither names nor power has changed. It is through naming that identity is found for people of African descent.

Journey

In the texts: *Praisesong for the Widow*, *Song of Solomon*, *Kindred*, and *Flying Home*, the components were demonstrated by the protagonists as they journeyed from several locations seeking freedom. Their journey physically and metaphysically is sometimes from North to South, New York to Tatem, South Carolina, or from various locations mentally to others, such as when Dana in *Kindred* transcends between eras or when Avey in *Praisesong* is transported in a dream back to Tatem. Home is where heritage begins and without epic memory, one could not get there.

Memory is what seems to have remained. Without memory retrieval there was no reenactments by faith and no need for flight, the journey. Virginia Hamilton defines flight as freedom. The journey of each protagonist led to freedom from social dualisms whereby forgetfulness and separation happen as one attempts to assimilate into another's society. Internal strivings lead to a need for salvation, wholeness, and reclaiming of one's identity. Without freedom to process thoughts there could be no spiritual healing or self-discovery.

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[43] Bailey, 8.

In Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow,* flight is a search for wholeness and spiritual regeneration from a fractured psyche caused by the pursuit of materialistic success where one forgets and separates from a previous lifestyle.[44] Avey Johnson's recurring dreams of childhood events with her deceased great-aunt Cuney in Tatem, South Carolina is troubling to her so she abruptly leaves an annual Caribbean Cruise that leads to an epic event in Carriacou, Grenada. Epic memory in this novel affects Avey's perception of flight because she has lost her identity, a requirement for wholeness.

Likewise, Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* seems to define "flight" as a journey that many people experience as the imagination allows one to travel through four of the five major elements of nature: earth, water, gold, and air to fulfill a life's purpose. It implies that the imagination and spiritual power also exist, giving one the ability to travel.[45] Morrison specifies the aim of her work as, to do a "radical shift in imagination from a female locus to a male one... To travel. To fly... A journey, then, with the accomplishment of flight, the triumphant end of a trip through earth, to its surface, on in to water, and finally into air."[46] Epic memory impacts Milkman's perception of flight as his purpose in life becomes clear mentally. His true identity is based on understanding the mythological meanings surrounding himself and his family.

Furthermore, in Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred,* flight is a metaphysical flight whereby the protagonist, Dana, an African-American woman transcends space and time from various locations.[47] Similar to Milkman in *Song,* Dana travels through four elements

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[44] Paule Marshall, *Praisesong for the Widow* (New York: Penguin Group, 1983), 37-40.
[45] Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon.*
[46] Ibid., xii.
[47] Octavia E. Butler, *Kindred* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979).

of nature: earth, water, fire, and air. The six scenes are the River, the Fire, the Fall, the Flight, the Storm, and the Rope which are all representative of the trials that she must overcome. Dana's salvation depends on her saving Rufus, a white man, the would-be father of her ancestor. Dana's wholeness came with a physical sacrifice as she lost her left arm on her last flight. Epic memory impacts Dana's perception of flight but only after she realizes that her 'life preservation' was her protector.

Lastly, in Ralph Ellison's *Flying Home*, flight represents a journey towards wholeness and reclaiming ones identity.[48] *Flying Home's* aim is to unravel Todd's broken identity as a black Tuskegee airman in America when African-Americans were not allowed to fly planes because of racism. Todd's plane kept him above a society and away from facing racism and his own prejudices. He had become his own enemy which was no different from the racists he desired respect from. Epic memory like in the other texts did impact Todd's perception of flight. His selfishness and hatred had turned him inside out, now hating his own people, people who would be instrumental in awaking his personal level of consciousness.

Marshall, and Morrison also situate flight, the circular journey or return as a physical manifestation of consciousness that is played out individually or in communal gatherings. The journey is literal and metaphorical. A major part of African culture is movement in a ring during ceremonies honoring the ancestors and elders who guide the participants back to self-awareness. This manifestation of consciousness brings forth internal struggle that often includes taking oaths and partaking in gatherings where symbolic meanings are drawn on the ground for understanding. The ritual serves as a

[48] Ralph Ellison, *Flying Home* in *Flying Home and Other Stories* (New York: Random House, 1996).

sacred reminder of communal cohesiveness and understanding of the life above and below the ground of water or river where the ancestors live.

The shout is performed today widely in churches and at epic events within the Gullah culture, and likewise in *Song of Solomon* by Milkman in front of Circe, a woman who seems to be ageless and who serves as a reference to the Greek goddess of magic who carries the same name. Circe was the midwife for Pilate, Macon her brother, and their mother Sing. In *Praisesong,* Avey actually performs the dance under the cover of darkness, in secret, outside the church as she and Aunt Cuney watch the participants inside. Pilate does not have a navel indicating that her mother Sing was the depositor of a seed brought forth by the ancestors, a mystical birth. Avey also attends the Big Drum or Beg Pardon, and performs the circle dance again, a reenactment of her faith, as she remembers the dance from Tatem, South Carolina. Avey explains that, "She felt like someone in a bad dream who discovers that the street along which they are fleeing is not straight as they had believed, but circular, and that it has been leading them all the while back to the place we're seeking to escape."[49] At the epic event, the elders sat or stood around a dirt circle representative of the four corners of the earth.

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[49] Marshall, *Praisesong for the Widow,* 83.

According to Robert F. Thompson and J. Cornet, in *Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds,* the circle is "[c]oded as a cross, a quartered circle or diamond, a seashell's spiral, or a special cross with solar emblems at each ending--- the sign of the four moments of the sun is the Kongo emblem of spiritual continuity and renaissance. . ."[50] Thompson adds that "the circle is written on the earth, and a person stands upon it to take an oath, or to signify that he or she understands the meaning of life as a process shared with the dead below the river or the sea--- the real sources of earthly power and prestige."[51] Epics almost always include drummers who call the deceased ancestors to join in as the participants ask for forgiveness. Drums which were banned in South Carolina during slavery emerge as the call to the people for some type of designated action. Avey with her South Carolina roots began performing the "Carriacou Tramp" identified as the dance of the tribe and recognized especially by the way she arched her back, shuffled her feet and extended her arms while in the circle. To Joyce Pettis, flight is a metaphorical journey for Avey, a memory that centers on barriers of spiritual renewal... moored as a youth, unmoored as a married adult to Jerome and her economic rise.[52]

Finally, even upon Milkman's arrival in Shalimar, Virginia, he witnessed eight or nine children, boys and girls standing in a circle singing. This circle game was actually the story of Solomon, his flying ancestor, a meaningless rhyme, and a kind of ring-around-the-rosy game. He recalls that in hysteria, one boy imitated a plane flying as the

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[50] Robert F. Thompson, and J. Cornet, *Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, (Washington: The University of Michigan, 1981), 28, 54, 151.
[51] Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit,* 10-11.
[52] Joyce Pettis, *The Journey Completed*, 122.

others sang fast several nonsense words, until finally the boy crashed to the ground and the last line to the song was, "Twenty-one children the last one *Jay/[Jake]*!"[53] Milkman had not played circle games as a youth but somehow knew that Pilate sang it the day he was born as Mr. Smith leapt from atop No Mercy Hospital. The legacy or myth was now passed to Milkman's generation as memory resurfaced. Spiritually, his desire to fly was his life's journey, all of which came in stages throughout his lifetime.[54]

The Internal Struggle

Internal struggle, as the first of the five stages in the Findings section demonstrate how epic memory is embedded in the soul. The internal struggle is what causes uneasiness based on situations, events, or unresolved strivings within the human spirit. There is a feeling of being stuck in a specific location based on the individuals social status, racism, death, or perception. In Marshall's text, both Avey and her husband Jerome, who was called Jay, are the main characters who struggle. Their struggle began on Halsey Street in Brooklyn when Jerome's salesmans' job was not enough to provide for the family. His desire to become a CPA, its time consuming educational requirements, and Avey's nagging and hatred of their community because of violence eventually led to a breakdown of their marriage. The intimate dances and playfulness stopped and were replaced with materialistic security after they moved to North White Plains. North indicates the pinnacle of life, and White Plains, purity and simplicity designed for a specific group of people. Jay's total consumption of attaining his CPA license caused him to forget the poems he recited from childhood and stop the visits to Igbos Landing, a visit

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[53] Morrison, *Song of Solomon,* 263-4, 303.
[54] Ibid., 4-6, 178.

he cherished after hearing the myth Avey told him about. Instead, Jay measured life and success based on Halsey Street and North White Plains. Avey then experiences loneliness after Jay's death and wanders until finally invited to the epic event.

Moreover, Avey's struggle involves dealing with the unexpected death of her husband and his haunting voice warning her about not wasting the insurance money, and the strange grimace on his face from the funeral that reappears when she is alone. Avey struggles with trying to understand the recurring dreams of Aunt Cuney calling her back to the Landing and her purpose in life now that Jay is dead. Avey and Jay both struggle with giving up materialistic things acquired in North White Plains, with childhood experiences, and memory of events that were once important in their lives.

At night, Avey often reminisced about the poems Jay spoke of having recited as a youth, and "lying awake ... her thoughts, her aching body, would secretly drink heady wine of that memory," her imaginations of the Eskimos practice of abandoning the old people on the ice to die, and the "praisesongs of a Sunday" that connected their "unknown heritage" and kept their love alive.[55] Avey and Jay both were given constant memory reminders to not abandon their heritage. Imagination and fragments of memory were central epic memory components that got the most attention.

Very similar is Milkman and Todd's struggle as children with not being able to fly. Milkman's struggle in *Song of Solomon* is with desiring to escape working in his father's business, the life and responsibility women required of him, and what he heard about the world made him wish he would die. As a four year old, not only did he desire to

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[55] Marshall, *Priasesong,* 81, 124-26, 137.

fly but also while in his mother's womb, Ruth went into labor as she watched Mr. Smith leap from Not Mercy Hospital, a place where mercy was desired among the blacks.

Morrison states that

> he [Mr Smith] hopes his flight, like that of the character in the title, toward asylum (Canada, or freedom, or the company of the welcoming dead), or home, is interpreted as a radical gesture demanding change, an alternative way, a cessation of things as they are. He does not want it understood as a simple desperate act, the end of a fruitless life, a life without examination, but as a deep commitment to his people.[56]

Milkman's struggled took him from North Carolina to Shalimar, Virginia in search of his African identity. His father's sister, Pilate, struggled with having witnessed her father's death by white men who killed him to take his land and with not knowing where his bones were laid. Hagar, her friend Reba's daughter, struggled with Milkman not accepting and loving her. She grieved herself to death over the thought of loosing him. His mother, Ruth, struggled with loneliness and the lack of physical touch. She often took flight to her father's grave in the early morning hours for closeness and consolation from a dead man when she had a husband, Macon Dead, who had not touched her since her thirties. Milkman's best friend, Guitar, struggled with racial injustices after moving North as a boy. He too witnessed Mr. Smith's leap from the hospital's roof. Guitar's membership with *Seven Days,* a group that killed whites whenever blacks were killed helped him deal with Emmett Till's untimely death. Guitar also struggles with Milkman's refusal to allow him to search for gold with him in Virginia. This refusal to Guitar is a betrayal of brotherly trust so he follows Milkman. Guitar was searching for the earthly mineral gold but Milkman was searching for the spiritual gold of finally knowing the

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[56] Morrison, *Forward,* xiii.

source of his internal struggles. Milkman's last struggle was accepting his identity as a descendent of flying Africans, thus, Guitar's threat to take his life after Pilate's life was taken gave Milkman an opportunity to leap as Mr. Smith did towards Guitar. In Morrison's text, the central elements that seemed to stand out were location, experience and reenactments.

An important symbolism amongst the Igbos and Gullah is the sacred buzzard, believed to represent the soul, duality, and the Great *Chi, the* protective spirit, who uses animals to transmigrate into. The *Chi* within the texts could very well have been hidden behind the name Miss Byrd, Todd's crash into the Buzzard, the kite the child was flying, or the Kite bird itself. The *Chi* is the twin or double of every person and is always present. Likewise, Todd, in *Flying Home*, achieves the high marks of becoming a Tuskegee Airman, but has not addressed his internal struggles of doubleness which began at age four when he saw an airplane and tried to reach it but was told that flying was for white men. He is stuck in a time zone and confronted with his identity and prejudice issues by Jefferson, the black sharecropper, after he hit a buzzard and crash. The need for healing of his divided soul was demonstrated by his coming to and seeing ". . . *two faces* suspended above him in a sun so hot and blinding that he could not tell if they were black or white."[57] The anger inside had so poisoned Todd that his prejudice was such that he did not want a white person to touch him. Flying training airplanes during World War II along with the affects of the Jim Crow Era had warped Todd's thinking towards the elderly blacks of who admired his flying ability. This causied Todd to put on the white mask of intellect and separatism because he thought denying his race and accepting the

[57] Ellison, *Flying Home,* 147.

white race was security. Ellison's novel focused more on the epic memory components of memory retrieval, imaginations, fragments, and location.

Nevertheless, Dana in *Kindred,* struggles with not being able to return home after time traveling from California to Maryland to protect Rufus's life while her husband struggles to understand how, when, and why she appears and disappears. Dana's perception of life, lost freedom, survival, and psychological movement is based on a doubleness caused by being pulled between two spaces with varying social constructs. The fourth of July should have been a day of freedom, but instead it was a day of bondage. Kevin, Dana's husband, initially is oblivious to plantation life after he is transported to Maryland holding on to Dana after one of her dizzy spells. Kevin realizes that Rufus's threats to kill him after he attempts to run away with Dana after her beating, is real. When Kevin realizes that Dana's *home* is now in Maryland and he can not just take her back to California he struggles with understanding racial issues of the South and new social rules he must abide by. Alice and her husband Isaac's struggle is the constant fight for freedom because of Rufus's infatuation with Alice. Alice and Rufus were childhood friends until Rufus inherited the slave master's authority from his father and had to decide between friendship and ruler. Sarah the cook serves as a mother figure and guide to Dana about plantation life. While there are other characters of which are constantly moving psychologically or physically, the characters all seem to be trying to reach a certain level of freedom away from rules, racial cruelty, family belief systems, or haunting memories. Butler's text focus more on the epic memory components of location, experience, and memory retrieval. Each of the protagonists, Todd, Dana, Milkman and

Avey all went through a series of struggles that stem from childhood memories. Recognizing this struggle was the beginning of accepting the internal call.

The Call

During the stage of the Call, there is a sense of confusion and denial as memory from ones painful past returns in fragments often began during childhood. The call separates people from geographic locations and enables them to free the mind and address troubling issues. Avey was seven and both Milkman and Todd was four when the desire to fly began, but the call came in adulthood. Avey's abandonment of friends on an annual cruise, the reoccurring dream and feeling of emptiness from when her deceased Aunt Cuney kept beckoning her to "come/Won't you come," back to Ibo Landing, the place she visited as a child.[58] Ibo Landing represents supernatural power and a continual connection with the ancestors because of separation and loss of identity.[59] The *two* fought blow for blow until Avey's "spring suit, the silk blouse, the gloves," were ripped off of her indicating the tearing away of the 'materialistic life' revealing her true self.[60] Peculiar to Milkman's call is the attachment to Mr. Smith's flight attempt with the blue wings and the timing of his birth; one was flying home and the other was being born. This incident indicates that Mr. Smith, Milkman, Solomon, and the Flying Africans were all connected by what Larry Neal calls "blood memory".[61]

Even Dana, in *Kindred,* was connected by this memory and was called on her journey to save an ancestor, Hagar, who had not been born. Dana's calling is not as

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[58] Marshall, 44.
[59] Ibid., 82, 188, 225, 235-6, 244-45.
[60] Ibid., 45.
[61] Kariamu Welsh-Asante, editor *The African Aesthetic: Keeper of the Traditions* edited by (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1993), iii. Introduction.

clearly defined as in *Praisesong for the Widow* and *Song of Solomon.* Dana is abruptly pulled from her living room into a racist era with no explanation indicates patterns often found in Science Fiction novels where life is ever changing between the past and present. However, what is clear is that imagination runs wild because of her stable past causing present events often to seem surreal. Dana was happily married and not expecting a life-changing or unexplainable sudden event. The call is not sporadic. It is destiny. Milkman thought he was chasing after gold in Virginia, while Todd was being chased by his "dreams of being cut in twain" in Alabama.[62] The call indicates that humankind is destined to evolve over their lifetime thereby locating one within a specific space. It is in this space whereby the griot guides and nurtures the wounded soul.

The Griot

The griot can appear before or after the call has been accepted. S/he can be an influential family member or a perfect stranger. The griot is a storyteller, an elder, a spiritual seer and guide explaining and coaching in hopes of rediscovering the suppressed identity. Pilate, Lebert Joseph, Aunt Cuney and Jefferson were all seers and conjurers, a representation of a divine being. Avey's boat ride on the tiny overcrowded schooner was a representation of the Africans experience during the Middle Passage. Her purge and ceremonial bath at Lebert's sister Rosalie Rarvay's house and the symbolic baptism were meant to cleanse her from all worldly possessions and sin in preparation of her healing and laying on of hands by the elders at the Big Drum. Avey's witness of the mass exodus of the natives leaving the city headed to Carriacou for the Big Drum demonstrated to her the importance of reverence and commemoration. The griot is the spiritual seer, seeing

[62] Cut in twain means being divided in two.

into both the past and future, connecting with both the living and the dead and keeping the cycle moving forward to ensure that the goal of consciousness or the awakening happens.

The Awakening

The awakening involves being consciously aware of onesself. It can occur in a familiar location or a location that has great significance for the individual. The awakening happens after acceptance and change of the persons condition physically, mentally, and spiritually. The protagonists realized their awakening within African environments once confronted with who they were and who they had become. Avey was taken back to her visits in Tatem, South Carolina an area very similar agriculturally to West Africa, and then she ended up in Grenada, a place where her ancestors were colonized and where African practices are still prevalent. Milkman left North Carolina in search for gold in Shalimar, Virginia, where he learned the importance of retaining the ancestral songs and dances performed daily by the children. Dana began in California and was transported metaphysically back to the rural South Maryland where her ancestors experienced slavery.

However, Todd simply circles around the state of Alabama where he began. Yet, another important feature of his awakening is naming. Todd's plane is called a ship, a vehicle or machine used to transport captive passengers. The plane also strips him of his identity because he is unable to have an effective relationship with anyone black or white. Grave's reference to Todd as a "black eagle" or pilot was derogatory because blacks were believed to not have the intellectual brain capacity to fly planes. In Ellison's novel,

buzzards are called "Jimcrows," an indication of the era of that day and Todd's attempt to penetrate that racist system by becoming an airman. Grave's instruction for Jefferson and Teddy to take Todd back to the "nigguh airfield" suggests the segregation and racism amongst the airmen.

Likewise, the name Pilate in *Song of Solomon* was also a word play on the characters' ability to fly at the end of the novel when she died or flew home while guiding Milkman to his final destination, a destination of awakening to his true identity and a reconciliation of his past and present. Milkman no longer has to keep looking back. Dana in *Kindred,* was awakened when her perception of freedom's cost, home whether in California or Maryland, and family survival was finally reconciled. Dana's awakening saved both her family in Maryland and in California and left her with a reminder of it in the form of a torn left arm as a sacrifice. Thus naming plays a critical role in identification whether it is of a person, place, or thing.

In *Praisesong* and *Song* naming holds its prominent place in African communities. First, "Avatara" is Avey's biological name and Avey is her Day Name, the name Aunt Cuney constantly reminds her to take back. Avey believes that names like Avatara "were those of someone who was no longer present, and she had become Avey Johnson even in her thoughts, a woman whose face, reflected in a window or mirror, she sometimes failed to recognize."[63] This observation was indeed revealing as to whom Avey really was to evolve into.

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[63] Marshall, 141.

Even as great-aunt Cuney returned in her dream, Avey felt like "a hole the size of a crater where her life of the past three decades had been," because she had forgotten her true identity. [64] The name Mr. Golla Mack represented by an elderly man's walking stick used to mark off a boundary around the water at Ibos Landing holds significance. Moreover, in *Song,* Milkman's name was given because he nursed long past the accepted timeframe of nursing. He was also labeled as being "deep," "peculiar," and "mysterious," perhaps being born with a caul, an indication of special powers still believed amongst the Gullah today.[65]

Further, the title of texts and subtitles are guides identifying the stages of the protagonists' journey and the emotions and feelings behind them. In Morrison's, Marshall's, and Ellison's novels, there is singing of songs in all three, but in Butler's novel, the usage of songs is replaced by Dana and Kevin's ability as published authors to represent singing. The impact of titles and singing on flying could represent freedom and understanding or awakening. An example of which is after Mr. Graves told Jefferson and Teddy to carry Todd back to the base, Todd thought he heard a mocking bird but it was a buzzard, then Teddy began humming along with the bird. The name Guitar is also associated with the African Griot who often carried a *guitar* when music was played for the king. Guitar was also Milkman's perfect evil, or twin, always opposing and challenging his rationale as a necessary evil required for maturity. The awakening comes with revelation. Milkman finally pieces together the circle songs and then realizes that it had been about Solomon's son Jake, "Twenty-one children the last one *Jake,*" the

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[64] Ibid., 196.
[65] Morrison, 9-10, 328, 337; Georgia Writer's Project, *Drums and Shadows*: *Survival Studies among the Georgia Coastal Negroes* (Athens: Publishing in Motion, 2011), 161-62.

ancestor left behind and the person he was searching for. He listened and *memorized* the song entirely, the same way Avey memorized the legend of the Flying Africans at Ibo Landing.[66] The Ibo Legend being recorded mentally or physically in its entirety demonstrates the importance Marshall place on ancient African literary texts and on commemoration.

Finally, from a different viewpoint, in *Flying Home,* Todd's identity was associated with his social and political status as a prestigious black Tuskegee airman. He does not celebrate his Africanness, uneducated blacks, or condescending white racists. Height and flight helps him internalize his struggles. The recitation of the story about the African man flying in heaven to fast without a helmet and an angel of God chastising him was Todd's wakeup call. The issue was not speed or flying, but losing focus of one's destiny. Todd was grounded so that he could re-member that his ability, character, and value system is what gave him the gift of flight. Todd, now an awakened being is prepared for wholeness, the final stage.

Wholeness

Wholeness signifies a spiritual and experiential reconciliation between one's past and present, self and community, thus reconnecting the protagonists' with their African roots, freeing them from internal strife, separation and loss of identity. The tearing away of the old self often involves active participation in rejoining the community and becoming active. Knowing the entire story of one's heritage demonstrates acceptance and the returning home. Aunt Cuney's grandmother's insight into the birth of Avey before she was born signifies divine intervention. Wholeness is when one can maintain

[66] Morrison, 302-3.

separation between one's mind and one's body and still be grounded in culture. If one can not physically remove oneself, then one must protect one's mental state regardless of one's physical location. This separation was a huge part of Dana's struggle. Wholeness allows the protagonists to "surrender to the air" the mental and physical self. The zeal to leap unafraid or return home physically impaired demonstrates flight by having full command over one's mind and destiny, thus transcending space, time, and nature's elements.

Wholeness is also revealed in numerology. The *Seven Days,* a club Guitar and Mr. Smith belonged to represents the number 7, the end of a cycle or completion. It also functions as a safe-haven, a Brotherhood, or secret society, similar to the Underground Movement in the rural South that ran from the South to the North. Wholeness shows up in Pilate's wine bottles symbolism of which represents the old and the new, from birth, to death, to rebirth. The clippings of Hagar's hair represent commemoration and remembrance. Finally, wholeness is the re-memory and piecing together of fragments from previous experiences, which is more spiritual than physical. Being "knocked back a hundred years..." into a time zone when blacks were not allowed to read, write, or think for one self is proof that wholeness is not about one's ability, but about one's perception and life changes.[67] Todd had been "flying blind" until his crash forced him to face the reality of what manhood really meant.

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[67] Ellison, 151.

Todd was awakened and made whole by Ellison's description of Todd's new insight, he "saw [seeing] a dark bird glide into the sun and glow like a bird of flaming gold."[68] Gold represents the highest level of spirituality, from man or clay to gold. Milkman also reached this level of spiritual ascendance when he chased gold to Virginia and discovered his true identity which allowed him to fly. Avey also reached a level of wholeness when she allowed herself to experience once again the freedom of community when she performed the ring dance at the Big Drum. Afterwards, she returned home and began to teach the children about their heritage. Dana's achievement of reaching the gold stage was demonstrated clearly as she saved both herself and Rufus as he went through several of the five elements of nature, gold, earth, air, water, fire, which represent the levels from carnality, clay, to spirituality, gold. Dana travels through six scenes: the River, the Fire, the Fall, the Flight, the Storm, and the Rope, all representations of the trials that she overcame. Wholeness is the point of revelation and conscious change. Ellison and Butler both used maps to assist Todd and Dana in reaching their destination or for pointing them in the right direction. Wholeness is internal and the result is spiritual regeneration that completes the journey.

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[68] Ibid., 170-72.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The original purpose of this research was to analyze the term flight in the Flying Africans' legend as both motif and consciousness in Paula Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow,* Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon,* Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred,* and Ralph Ellison's *Flying Home*. While the research discussed in this literature review demonstrated several variations of the flight motif, there is still a gap in linking the motif and consciousness directly as African American survival strategies because of varying word usage. This research expands this notion, arguing that the flying Africans legend is an actual literary motif that manifests in both mental and physical locations. In the texts, everything and everybody is moving. All of the texts have an age hierarchy for gaining information, wisdom and knowledge, and insight about the flight story and how it is played out daily in one's life. Flight is more than physical flying and each of the protagonists' believes in flight in some way. Location is essential because all texts spaces become important to the story and have a certain meaning.

This consciousness was revealed throughout the texts by beliefs in one's ability to fly, perceptions, and actions. Additionally, this research placed emphasis on positing each of the books as a whole [a continuum of the story and life of African people] and not as a separate issue, making it easier to link the patterns and themes. Sources reveal

that the flying Africans motif is still in existence but expressed as a metaphor in various ways throughout the Diaspora, and that the traditions may never be totally lost as long as there is memory. Memory in these sources ran parallel with age, as one becomes older the more powerful the memory and imagination. Further research on the topic of the flight motif should bring new knowledge because the elders are passing away and the youth are leaving the islands and culture for economic and educational reasons.

The Gullahs' cultural beliefs, and their refusal to assimilate into mainstream society, and their ability to maintain a unique identity for over two centuries, is a topic for further research. This research adds to the scholarship of flight texts by demonstrating that African cultural beliefs are retained through epic events. The Gullah are direct descendants of the Igbos, the flying Africans, brought to the southeastern United States from West Central Africa to cultivate rice, indigo, and cotton. More importantly, the Igbos left behind a rich culture that includes a Creole language, basket sewing, okra and rice cuisines, ceremonial rituals, songs, dances, and tales that are linked to various parts of Africa and religious beliefs that combines African, Islam, and Christian practices that has sustained their community for over two hundred years. The research pose four major questions: 1) Where is home in relationship to flight and its relationship to epic memory? 2) What is the concept of the origination of flight as utilized by the Igbos? 3) In what ways is flight transferable as reflected in the four selected texts? and 4) What factors identified in flight and epic memory are reflective in the lived experiences and culture of the Gullah as revealed in the four texts?

The findings reveal that home in relationship to flight and its correlation to epic memory is in Africa (the universal mind) within a community of believers whose aim is to make known the African ways by a collective memory. The Igbos' understanding of flight is a return and remaining in Africa by using mind control to will themselves home. It is their belief that the soul departs at death. Africans have no distinction between the physical and spiritual world; it is a part of the universal cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. This belief is also demonstrated in various flight texts and films where the soul leaves the body for protection or at death, return to Africa or reincarnate and begins another journey.[1] Flight is transferable as reflected in the texts whereby an elder imparts a special calling that includes flight or it is given by birthrights. Though none of the protagonists had physically visited Africa, the symbolisms such as the ring or circle dances, the storytelling, and epic annual events kept them connected in the recesses of their minds. Even today, those symbolisms or fragments serve as reminders to those who have never visited Africa; they are carried to Africa daily through symbolisms longing to be connected. These symbolisms were brought from Africa and dispersed throughout the Diaspora and have literally reached the modern world linking African people together by depositing fragments of experiences and epics within the mind.

Flight, then varies among African literary texts and links directly to African cosmology through symbolisms which are fragments. Flight operates as a metaphor, a journey, a return, running away, actual flying, survival, consciousness, a historical

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[1] Julie Dash, *Daughters of the Dust* (New York: Penguin Group, 1997), 102-4, 306-7. Moustafa Gadalla, *Egyptian Cosmology: The Animated Universe*, Rev. 2nd ed. (Greensboro: Tehuti Research Foundation, 2001), 107, 127, 130. Clenora Hudson-Weems, Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow:* Authentic Existence in *African Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves* (Troy: Bedford Publishing, 1993), 117.

passage, and remembrance. Flight is circular and depicts the journey or cycle of life one must take to fully awaken to African consciousness. The circle or return home is one of the most prominent African retentions within the Gullah community, and the Gullah people find it critical in keeping the living dead, those who are alive but spiritually disconnected from reality, and the deceased spiritually connected by spirit possession of the ancestors. A principal fact is that memory is "long and expansive" longing to be joined to its center whereby the emotional feeling realm is tapped and spiritual experiences occur. Memory then is recalled by experiences, imaginations, fragments, reenactments and recitations and is with us from birth.

Additionally, flight reveals that Marshall, Morrison, Butler, and Ellison as well as Julie Dash and Virginia Hamilton undoubtedly hold a firm belief in the African cosmology or the evolution of the universe and humankinds' response to it, and the importance of keeping legends alive through literary genre. The process of attaining consciousness by a series of trials by fire during ones life's journey is central among Africans in the Home Land and is brought forth by these scholars through fragments of symbolisms. Fire was represented by the gold symbolism of which includes fire, earthquakes, wind, rainstorms, and crashes. There were numerous symbolisms that ran parallel in the texts in usages that includes the naming of people, places, and things such as, Macon Dead, Sing, Pilate and other biblical names, Not Mercy Hospital, White Plains, and The Landing, colors, songs, dances, and numerology representing embedded codes within African tales and genres used as fragments that rejoin memory. These scholars have intentionally hidden nuggets of African retention within their texts, left

behind so that the reader finds the literary treasures. Examples of these fragments are traced in all of the protagonists' lives as they begin their journey home.

Avey's flight challenged her materialistic imbalance that caused a wedge between her South Carolina upbringings and her New York middle-class lifestyle.
Her trial by fire burned away all worldly pollutions so that only "the indestructible will" remains.[2] She lost value systems necessary for survival after years of plunging into a spiritual death of economic wealth whereby only a spiritual regeneration could save her. After being restored to her community she begins a new life at sixty-five, assume her birth name, "Avatara," and remain the conscious Avatara and not the unconscious Avey. Her authentic existence was centered on being culturally conscious and grounded in heritageas her "rememory and recovery" of ancestry took place by acknowledging her birth name and her new role as teacher.[3] The name "Avatara" in Sanskrit means the descent of a deity or Supreme Being who has come to Earth.[4] Avatara came to earth and evolved from the state of matter to spirit an evolution that all of the protagonists must go through. They each gained important lessons in African history and its value systems. They came to know themselves and reclaimed their heritage. This memory is preserved by spiritual recitations, commemorations, and imaginations.

Milkman's flight led him to maturity as the internal desire to fly troubled him mentally. He was led to the mount where not only Pilate was sacrificed so that he could live but also it was the place where he met his god hidden within his soul. His ability to

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[2] Joyce Pettis, *The Journey Completed: Spiritual Regeneration* in *Praisesong for the Widow* in *Towards Wholeness* in *Paula Marshall's Fiction* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 16, 112, 116.
[3] Hudson-Weems, 106, 115.
[4] Ibid.

fly came after he learned his heritage and witnessed Pilate, his teacher, breathe her last breath. His courage and leap towards Guitar, his best friend and evil opposite was necessary to challenge fear, his reasoning and his willingness to accept his ancestral gifts of spiritual rebirth and journeying home. In flight, he gained courage, knowledge and understanding as he flew towards Guitar, his enemy and friend to a physical death and spiritual renewal passed on to him by his ancestors.

Furthermore, Dana's flight in *Kindred* was both metaphysical and physical. Will power and imagination transport her through two eras that needed reconciliation so that life is possible for her in the future. She, like Solomon was not confined by the elements of nature. As one's own Savior, recalling fragments of memory that gives power to return home, not with objects, but with understanding the importance of self and cultural preservation, it was this revelation that saved Dana. For Dana, memory was a survival tool that "she" controlled whenever life's experiences brought trials her way. The *return* happened numerous times until she became an active participant in her own survival. Dana's flight(s) was peculiar to Rufus's father who was not simply inquisitive about her disappearances but to him she held the position of a god or conjurer one who could control even the elements. Butler's emphasis on his statements suggests that he was familiar with African spirit manifestations or unequivocally had heard of it among the Africans. Dana's last flight is completed after her ancestor Hagar is born; she is almost dead; and she sacrifices her left arm as she rips through a wall leaving a scar, a symbolism of her desire to live, to fly.

Lastly, Todd's flight in *Flying Home* came after he realized that a physical object could not save him from a spiritual struggle. Flight included literal flying and the usage of physical objects such as the plane, the kite, and the buzzard. Ellison posits Todd in an object that represents social status, segregation and importance, but it was during a period of history when African Americans were not allowed to fly. Location, as in the other texts, was critical in his perception of himself and of events since the plane positions him above life's normal situations. Todd's flight kept him beyond reach of everyday external struggles of racism and inequality. His training made him an efficient operator of aircraft during inclement weather, but he was not prepared for resolving internal struggles of the mind and soul on a clear day. Todd's disconnect from the plane, a flying object of security was to reconnect him with the people and reality. Todd's spiritual roadblock was two common objects that roam the air frequently, a kite that represented youth, and a buzzard that represented spirit presence and maturity. Todd lived in two worlds. His recurring dream of being "cut in twain" by a propeller demonstrates the severity of his double-consciousness and his need for reconciliation. His internal anger, perception, and location left him alone to deal with the soul-mind. Most importantly his final flight in the rubble of a mangled plane came after a story was told of a natural event that held such a spiritual truth that he was reconciled back to his community and *flew home* an awakened being both physically and mentally.

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this research was to investigate the findings of recurring patterns of flight in the four texts. The patterns included duality, death, circle songs and dances, and consciousness. There were seven components of epic memory that

Molefi K. Asante and Derek Walcott expressed: memory retrieval, the spiritual dimension of experience, imagination, recitation, fragments, reenactments, and location all components that explained how memory is retrieved and accessed. Next, there were the five stages of the circle or journey that are necessary for the evolution of all humans, they are: the internal struggle, the call, the Griot, the awakening, and wholeness. Flight grew out of the legend of the Flying Africans by retrieving fragments of memory stored from experiences in Africa that led to epic commemorations held within the Igbo/Gullah culture by faith.

Subsequently, for the Gullah flight included literary genre as a return or journey, a metaphor, consciousness, survival, and epic memory. The findings reveal that the Igbos did not believe death "kills" the soul, as some westerners believe. The Igbos believe that the soul lives eternally, from mortality to immortality, and departs when the body dies but continues to live in another being. Thus, the Igbos' understanding of flight and its possibility were central to their belief system because death is really life, an eternal continuance with the ancestors, meaning the soul rejoins the greater Spirit and continues its journey after the body cease to function. The Igbos believed that death was the transcendent return to the homeland.[5] They are seers, seeing into both the past and present, which is really the now. Flight for the Igbos and Gullah is epic memory or an epic journey whereby one is able to return home metaphysically, physically, and mentally at will. This belief in epic memory, flight, is the reason African literary scholars continue to write about epic journeys using the term "flight," and holding sacredly a body of

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[5] Daniel P. Mannix, *Black Cargoes: A History of the Atlantic Slave Trade: 1510-1865* (New York: Viking Press, 1962), 117-18.

African beliefs and practices hidden behind symbolisms that are embedded deep within texts that retain fragments of the legend of the Flying Africans.

Recommendations

The first recommendation for further research is to include the terms mortality and immortality when researching flight texts. This is suggested because after study of the texts and recognizing patterns of African cosmology it was revealed that the soul journeying from incarnation to reincarnation is in essence the journeying from mortality to immortality, the place of total consciousness whereby one moves between the physical and spiritual or metaphysical realms. The researcher believes this further study could add to the understanding of the importance today of upholding value systems critical to one's survival.

Another recommendation includes Gullah groups in Florida and Virginia and compare their reenactments of the circle songs, dances and recitations to determine retention percentages after migration and separation. This addition also include determining if there are natural causes, birth rites, or birthdays that determines who is chosen to record the history. Through family and friend discussions about this research it was discovered that there is at least one in each family who has a strong desire to trace one's family tree.

Lastly, to bring further awareness to the origination of children's ring or circular songs and dances throughout the United States to determine possible African retention. African Americans live within the United States' aesthetic and have retained fragments of their own African aesthetic like the blending of African, Islam, and Christian practices

without having visited Africa. Further research could possibly yield similarities of children's lyrics and meanings that have changed over the centuries and that are unrecognizable today. This research has revealed that African retentions literally encircle our lives daily embedded within codes hidden behind symbolisms.

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